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BOLD BENDIGO

BOLD BENDIGO

*A Romance
of the Open Road*

BY
PAUL HERRING

"Bendy's" short for Bendigo, you should see him peel,
Half of him was whalebone, half of him was steel.

"Bendy's Sermon," By Sir A. Conan Doyle



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BOLD BENDIGO

CHAPTER I

A YOUNG MAN WITH THE BLUE BIRDSEYE

"It's ^PAN old coat to go to the fair in," said Bendigo's mother.

"I'll spruce it up till it looks like new," said Bendigo, brushing away at the old coat.

"You'll never bring back the nap that's worn off it, my lad."

Bendigo whistled to the old coat.

"Or whistle back the color that's faded out of it," said Bendigo's mother.

Her experience in these matters was that once departed, nap and color can never be persuaded to return. But when all is said and done, a young man in an old coat takes the eye more than an old fop in a new one. And even a coat that has seen its best days can be freshened up surprisingly by the showy flutter of a fine silk handkerchief.

"It looks better than it did," said Bendigo.

"So it does, my lad, an' you can't expect to groom an old nag into a young colt."

"When I get money enough I'll buy a new coat," said Bendigo.

"You shall, my lad, and glad will I be to see you wearing it."

"If I'd as much money as I could spend
I never would try old coats to mend."

"It begins to look like my Sunday coat, mother."

"Why, then, put i' - ' ' "

"His Sunday coat the youth put on
For Jenny had vowed away to run
With Jockey to the Fair."

"It's a handsome coat, now," grinned Bendigo, walking round himself with a mirror in hand.

"Put that down, you Jack-a-Dandy, an' take the old clout of a belcher off your neck. I've got a fairing for you, my lad."

Bendigo's mother pulled open a creaking drawer in the old mahogany dresser and drew out a spotted blue neckerchief of the pattern familiarly known as the blue birdseye. A flutter of silk and lavender followed. The shaking out of the big blue neckerchief with its white spots made the green linnet in the window fly from perch to perch and set its cage jiggling.

"There'll be a young man to go the fair wi' a bonny new birdseye round his neck," said Bendigo's mother.

The young man in question was attracted from his admiration of the old coat by the new neckerchief.

"Why, mother, it smells as pretty as a posy," he said.

"'Tis sweet as a nosegay and how should it be anything else, lad, sin' it stands for twenty-four foot o' good fighting grass, thick wi' daisies an' hemmed by rope and stakes; for of all gay colors ever worn, the old blue birdseye is the pick o' the Fancy an' cock o' the ring. Jem Belcher first wore a fighting kerchief round his waist when he fought Andy Gamble under Jerry Abershaw's gibbet on Wimbledon Common, and that's how it got the name of belcher. Andy Gamble being Irish wore green garters, but Jem Belcher had the Bristol yellowman tied round his waist—a yellow handkerchief wi' red spots. But gie me the true blue fogle wi' the white birdseye as worn by Tom Cribb, Tom Spring, and Jem Ward."

Busy fingers had Bendigo's mother as she tied the handsome new fogle, or handkerchief, dexterously round his neck; and bold, smiling eyes; a comely woman and a buxom figure of a woman, with a bold saying ever upon her lips to match the bold light in her eyes. She loved to read about the battles of the old prize ring, and sing the ballads made up about them by Bob Gregson, the pugilistical poet laureate, and Frosty Faced Fogo, his lawful successor. She was a regular Gallows Hill Remembrancer in the matter of hangings and transportations, and when a coach went out with convicts for Botany Bay she would smuggle tea, or snuff, to the women and tobacco to the men and bid them lead a new life in a new country.

"They will all say it's a present from your sweetheart, lad," she teased.

"But you know well enough that I have no sweetheart, mother."

"I'd mill her if you had," Bendigo's mother said ungraciously. "Your lass mun feight your owd mother for you, and if she wins I'll gie her the stakes and she can gie me a kiss. Fine and handsome you look now, Bendy lad, but I'd sooner see you out of favor and wi' your face smashed than a loser and, worst of all a coward."

The thump of her fist shook the table.

"You've heard me read out o' Scripture 'My heritage is like a speckled bird,' and like a speckled bird is the blue birdseye fluttering at your neck, Abednego, my son. It's your fighting color, and you mun have eyes everywhere to be worth the wearing of it. Who's coming to the boxing booth in the fair?"

"Jem Burn and his company of London pugs."

"Why, that's 'Skiver.' He hails from Newcastle, and is nevvv to old Ben Burn, who keeps the Rising

Sun, a London house, where the Fancy used to send their challenges from. He fought big O'Neil, the Irishman, one of Jack Langan's novices. You've heard me tell how Jack Langan fought Tom Spring twice for the championship, Bendy. Jem Burn beat O'Neil well under an hour, but he lost three fights out of four afterwards."

"Sam Turner says he'll have a turn-up with old Jem, mother. There's a young fellow they call the Newcastle Youth, or Jem Burn's novice, who is said to be a wonder with the gloves. Jem is willing to forfeit five pounds if any lad in the fair can stand up to his novice for ten minutes."

"Go into the booth, then, and fight the Newcastle Youth. You've fought lads twice your size on the lammas fields and beat 'em. I've watched you grow up feightin', an' I've tried to teach you not to put the last foot first, an' not to lead off wi' the wrong mawler. But when it's nature's own way even a mother's fondness can't make her lad feight any other way. Sam Turner's a milling cove, an' if he thinks you're good enough for Jem Burn's novice, so do I. Go into the booth, my lad, and feight him, but remember the old blue birdseye is peeping at you wi' all its eyes, an' for the pride of it don't let the Newcastle Youth beat you."

She was at the window with her own bold eyes to watch him go down the street. Looking natty enough in his old blue coat and the new birdseye, Bendy went off to meet Sam Turner, the Nottingham middle-weight, who was proud of having such a smart young fellow for his novice.

"You're coming on, Bendy," Sam chuckled. "Blow me, what a swell you're getting. One of these fine days I shall have to give you a dashed good leathering

to take some of the conceit out of you. But maybe the Newcastle Youth'll do it. It wouldn't surprise me if you came out of Jem Burn's booth with an ogle to match the fogle." By which he meant an eye the color of the dark blue belcher.

"What else could you expect of Sam Turner's novice?" Bendy asked innocently.

"I can see I shall have to take my coat off to you," Sam growled. "You're a-coming on a bit too much, my lad. You might be wearing a peacock's tail instead of a flash birdseye."

The fair soon made itself heard. They entered it between the gingerbread stalls, nearly deafened by the din of shouting showmen and the hurdy-gurdies of the swings and roundabouts. A brass band was playing on the front of Wombwell's menagerie, and they had to stop to watch the whip-cracking of the one-armed negro lion-tamer. They passed waxworks, giants, midgets, a "True Representation of the Murder of Mr. Weare in Gill's Hill Lane," and other London catchpennies. A London company of actors was strutting in sock and buskin outside Richardson's Theatre, and next to it, almost the last show in the fair, stood Jem Burn's boxing booth.

On the show front Jem Burn and his little company of pugilists were gathered. A young man, with a face as dark as his fiddle, was scraping out jigs, but the chief attraction was a girl wearing a gypsy dress with ribbons in her hair. She danced and beat a tambourine as Jem Burn introduced his troupe, and Bendy thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, for she had gypsy eyes, a wealth of dark hair snared in cherry ribbons, and a creamy skin, sunburned by the open air and the country road.

She was at the sweetest age of girlhood, and she

smiled as her bright roving eyes caught the young man with the blue birdseye watching her.

"All comers are welcome and will receive fair treatment and civility," Jem Burn declared. "I am ready to box a round or two myself with any man who likes to put 'em up, and my nephew here, the Newcastle Youth, will take on any young man who thinks himself a handful. Any hardy young fellow who can best the Newcastle Youth, two rounds out of three, will be entitled to the forfeit money of £5, paid to him over the ropes without any dispute or dickering."

Sam Turner called out who he was, and said he stood ready to box Jem Burn. Bendy straightway declared that he had come with Sam, and was just as ready to step into the ring with the Newcastle Youth. They paid for admission and went inside and the booth at once began to fill up.

As she handed him a soiled and worn pair of boxing gloves, the girl with the cherry ribbons whispered to Bendy:

"The Newcastle Youth is my brother."

"I won't hurt him more than I can help," Bendy said stolidly.

The girl gave him a quick glance to see if he was joking, and then burst into a ripple of laughter that seemed to fill the dingy tent with music. But Bendy could not understand what she was laughing at. After a few rounds with Sam Turner, during which he continually had to be on the defensive, Jem Burn was too winded to say much, so some of the other boxers set to in the small ring. Then Jem announced a turn-up between the Newcastle Youth and a Nottingham novice. The brown-skinned young man, who had been playing a fiddle on the show front ducked under the ropes. Bendy took his coat and the new blue silk birdseye off

and told Sam Turner to look after them. Sam also helped him on with the gloves, which were old, coarse, and cumbersome, the stuffing coming out of the leather. With a flash of white teeth and dark eyes the Newcastle Youth set about Bendigo. Mindful of his promise to Cherry Ribbons not to hurt her brother, Bendigo played lightly, and, in consequence, received a smashing blow on the mouth, which knocked him up against the ropes. They tightened with a sudden jerk, and he pitched forward on his face. Sam Turner picked him up, and "kneaded" him.

"Blow me if you didn't walk slap up to him and ask for that one," he growled. Bendy's mouth was cut and bleeding, and he saw Cherry Ribbons laughing at his discomfiture on the other side of the ring against her brother. Picking up the new blue birdseye which Sam Turner had folded and laid on the old blue coat in their corner, Bendigo gave it a natty twist and tied it round his waist. Cherry Ribbons burst into a peal of mirth.

"Look at the young man with the blue birdseye," she scoffed, and the Newcastle Youth laughed derisively.

"Never mind about spreading out the peacock's tail. Slip into him, my lad," Sam Turner advised. Jem Burn, still blowing, consulted a silver turnip watch and called "T-t-time!"

The Newcastle Youth tried with both hands. Out for his bread and cheese, his uppermost intention was to dispose of Bendigo as soon as possible. There was the smack and thud of a glove between the blows. Bendy had ducked one, stopped the other, and tabholed his opponent with a back-handed right. The Newcastle Youth was nettled. He dashed in and tried to knock Bendigo over the low ropes. But Bendy ducked and dodged all that was coming to him, and

getting inside his man made the gloves crackle in his face by three or four stingers, one on the heel of the other. Jem Burn's face fell and Cherry Ribbons turned white and anxious. Sam Turner's friends and the countrymen round the ropes cheered Bendigo. Forgetting all about Cherry Ribbons, he fought the Newcastle Youth round the ring and sent him down with a right to the chin that lifted him off his feet.

When the Newcastle Youth came up for the third round his dark face was lumpy and all of a dull flush. The ridge of black curly hair bristled along his neck and he went for Bendigo savagely. But Bendy was now all over him. He slammed left and right to face and ribs with jabs and jolts that made him rock and finally knocked him helplessly back on the ropes with a right uppercut which had the full lift of arm, hip, and leg behind it.

Jem Burn stopped the fight amidst a scene of tremendous excitement, and said something to Cherry Ribbons, who came up to Bendy and asked, with a catch in her breath, "Will you have one of my ribbons to wear?"

He shook his head. "No, lass, I'll have the five pounds that I've won." The girl flushed and turned away.

"We can't pay it," Jem Burn said. "It was only offered to fill the show. We shan't take it all day. Look here, my lad, I'll give you three pounds down in your hand and pay you the rest when we take it."

After consulting Sam Turner, Bendigo agreed to this arrangement. There was a cheer as Jem Burn ostentatiously paid the money over to Bendigo at the ringside. He saw the tambourine girl glancing sulkily at him. But he thought no more of Cherry Ribbons for he caught sight of his mother waiting for him with

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Sam Turner outside the booth. There she stood, her bare arms akimbo, her glossy dark hair streaming from under her mob cap, her ample bosom heaving, her bold black eyes flashing, and her rosy cheeks glowing in healthy contrast with the painted faces on Richardson's show front.

"I was at the ropes watching you mill into him, Bendy," she said, "and you did it well enough when he got your monkey up. I said nowt, for I wanted the birdseye to do all the chirruping."

"He's coming on, mother," Sam Turner chuckled. "A reg'lar birdseye bantam, so he is. Jem Burn told me at the ropes he'd never seen a quicker head on a pair of shoulders."

"It's a pity 'Skiver' don't pay his money out as easy as he does his compliments," Bendigo's mother said dourly. "But I'll tell you this to your face, Sam Turner—if you treat him fair you've got a novice that will be a credit both to you and the old blue birdseye."

"Ay, that he will, ma'am," said a man in a shabby velvet cap who stood outside the boxing booth selling ballads and broadsheets, some of them containing last dying speeches and confessions edified and adorned with such vile woodcuts as might have been chopped off the gallows tree and engraved by Jack Ketch himself.

"Lives of all the milling coves," he cried. "'Tom and Jerry, or Flash Life in London,' with all the chaunts and pictures. Life of Thurtell, the Swell Yokel, who was hanged for the murder of Mr. Weare in Gill's Hill Lane the day after the fight between Tom Spring and Jack Langan."

Bendigo, who had seen the man with the velvet cap inside the booth, noticed now that he wore buff breeches, a red waistcoat, yellow stockings, and an old-

fashioned cutaway coat with metal buttons, which added to the oddity of the jockey's cap.

Such eccentricity of dress was well fitted to the trade of a flying stationer, or peddler of chapbooks and news sheets, which the man was plying, and to call attention to his wares he commenced to sing in a cracked voice to the old tune of "The Trotting Horse" an account of the mill between the Gaslight Man and George Cooper—

"Come all you sporting gentlemen in country or in town,
I'll sing to you a song of pugilistical renown."

"Why, the man's got a voice like a cracked pancheon," said Bendigo's mother and began to help him out with the next two lines which she knew as well as the flying stationer himself—

"Concerning one Tom Hickman who to milling laid a claim,
And the notable George Cooper, you must have heard his fame."

Then they both joined in the rousing refrain, which ran—

"Who could hit away and slash away and mill away and dash away,
With a fal-de-ral-de-lay, all the long summer's day."

"Why ma'am you sell my ballads better than I can," said the man with the velvet cap, after handing out a number of his halfpenny broadsheets.

"I can sing 'em better than you can," Bendigo's mother agreed.

"I shouldn't wonder if they make one up about Blue Birdseye before he's much older," said the flying stationer, who had young blue eyes looking out of a face like a wrinkled apple. "I saw him hit away at the Newcastle Youth inside Jem Burn's booth, and he shapes well enough to come to London and show a fine feather among the Fancy. I shall have to introduce him to my old friend, Tom Spring, at the Castle Tavern, better known in my time as Bob's

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Chop House, or to my older friend, Tom Cribb, at the Union Arms in the Haymarket."

"Do you know Tom Cribb?" asked Bendigo's mother.

"Ma'am, I have the honor to be wearing one of his old red weskits at this very moment," said the peddler with as courtly a bow as the fair would allow him to make. "I have seen all sorts of weskits worn by milling coves from ratskin to brocade, but Tom Cribb's is a good innkeeper's red weskit, though he has become more portly since he doffed the one I am wearing. But if you would see a bit of good cloth, ma'am, look upon this faded old coat which was once of a fine claret or purple hue. It has been long out in the wind and rain and has shrunk to humor an old man's frame, but it once fitted the finest pair of shoulders in England. Like stag-horns they were—ay, ma'am, like stag-horns."

"An' who carried 'em?" asked Sam Turner, almost uncivilly.

"Fitted his shoulders like a glove it did," mused the flying stationer, forgetful of the fair, his blue eyes far away in London town and his brain hunting hares under the shabby old velvet cap.

"Whose shoulders was they?" Sam Turner repeated, "that's what I'm asking."

"Ay! Who wore the claret-colored coat?" Bendigo's mother demanded with some eagerness.

"What's that, ma'am?" said the day-dreamer, returning to the fair. "Why, who other than Gentleman Jackson."

"Ay, who else could it be than Gentleman Jackson," said Bendigo's mother as if the answer was the only one to be expected, and had been on the tip of her tongue.

Sam Turner looked somewhat crestfallen, but unconvinced.

"This was the coat that Gentleman Jackson wore at the coronation of His Majesty, King George IV," said the flying stationer. "Ecod! How he would frown to see old Jerry in it at the fair. I would travel far to be at a country fair, ma'am, although my true line of business is selling race-cards to the nobility and gentry at the fashionable horse races."

"By what you say you must be Jerry, the old stager, better known as Fettle Porter."

"The werry same cove, ma'am, wi' a touch of Dick Christian's velvet cap to you for discoverin' on' it. 'Tis many a year ago since I fettle the Prince's porter, but Lord how the name has stuck to me. 'Jerry,' said the Regent, 'I'm demned if I like this London porter.' 'You will do after I've fettle it for your Royal Highness,' says I. 'Done what to it, Jerry?' says he, an' he watched me put a poker in the fire an' a grate of nutmeg an' a sweetener in the pewter, and stir the porter wi' the hot poker till it frizzled. An' when he drank it the Regent smacked his lips an' said, 'Gad! Jerry, it's demned good—you shall fettle my porter for me whenever I drink the demned stuff.'"

Jerry was now a gentleman in brocade to Bendigo's mother, and she wondered if his yellow stockings had once belonged to the Prince Regent. But out of the corner of his eye Bendigo was watching Cherry Ribbons on the show front, and her tambourine was more in his ears than Jerry's tale of the Regent's porter.

"Who did you say that pair of shoulders like stag's horns belonged to?" Sam Turner asked, still thinking hard.

"Gentleman Jackson who beat Mendoza the Jew,

and George the Brewer. An' would have beat Pewter Bill but for the accident of breaking his leg."

Sam Turner shook his head.

"I know nowt about Pewter Bill, but I'll bet you level silver the Duke o' Limbs, otherwise Joe Whitaker, the Squire o' Ramsdale House, on Nottingham Forest, showed a better spread of shoulders than Gentleman Jackson or Pewter Bill."

The blue eyes of the flying stationer twinkled.

"Not knowing his Grace the Duke of Limbs I won't take you," he said, "but John Jackson's figure is still esteemed the best in London for dignity and deportment, although Mr. John Gully, Member of Parliament, is a good second; indeed, Mr. Gully runs him close for being a man of distinction although nothing so much in the classic mould. But the fair is all going past us with money in its pockets, and I have still my stock of broadsheets to sell."

"I'll have six pen'orth," said Bendigo's mother.

"Why, ma'am, you shall have the baker's dozen of them, which is all I carry, and better exchange for a sixpence was never made."

Thumbing the broadsheets, old Jerry handed over a crumpled dozen, with an odd one in for luck, and left them, singing at the top of his cracked voice:

"The fatal story you shall hear,
John Thurtell's life I will begin
He murdered Mr. William Weare,
A gent as lived at Lyon's Inn."

CHAPTER II

CHERRY RIBBONS

"FROM the good claret cloth, shabby as it had gone, you may be sure it was the coat Gentleman Jackson wore at King George's coronation," Bendigo's mother said next morning. "What he told us about John Thurtell was true enough. He stood up to the rope wi' a smile when they brought the news to him on the gallows that Tom Spring had beat Jack Langan two days before. 'Twas as sweet to him as the flower that Jerry Abershaw, the London highwayman, had in his mouth when they turned him off at Tyburn. Handsome scoundrels, both of 'em!" From which it is to be inferred that if a man died with a bold gesture it was a frill of romance over the rope to Bendigo's mother. She could never refuse her sympathy to a bold rogue, although she thoroughly detested a mean one, such as a cheat.

"Don't you let 'Skiver' skin you out of the two pounds he owes," she said. "He'll take a lot of money' in the fair and ought to pay the full five pounds he offered on the show front."

"I'll go for it to-night," Bendigo promised.

It was late that night when he made his way to Jem Burn's boxing booth for the remainder of his money. The fair was still lighted up, but the shows were closing. Two or three candles in glass bottles guttered on the show front, and Cherry Ribbons was reaching one down when she saw Bendigo. Her eyes

were still sulky, and he thought she looked like a pretty play-actress in the long shadows of the tallow light.

"Uncle Jem, here's the young man with the blue birdseye," she called out.

A shuffling about of feet in the lighted tent followed, and, turning to him, she taunted:

"My brother would have milled you with the mawlies. It was only the gloves saved you."

Before Bendigo could reply the Newcastle Youth thrust his head through the baize curtain and invited him to come inside and have a few rounds with the knuckles for love.

Jem Burn smoking a clay pipe, pushed his way between them.

"He wants his money, uncle," mocked Cherry Ribbons, jingling a tambourine.

"He'll get civility from me, at all events," Jem Burn said affably enough. "So you've come for the money as you think is owing to you, my lad? Well, now, I don't blame you for that, neither. But what do you say to earning it first? I'll pay you the other two pounds at the end of the week if you'll come and spar a few rounds in the booth while the fair lasts."

"I'll knock his flaming head off if he does," the Newcastle Youth threatened

"Why the devil, can't you be civil?" Jem Burn asked, turning on his nephew. "Let the young fellow decide for himself."

The sulkiness in the girl's eyes softened into silkiness and flashed at Bendigo in a glance so bright that two more candles seemed to have been lighted.

"Take it on, Blue Birdseye," she coaxed.

"I'll see what Sam Turner has to say about it," Bendy answered warily.

Cherry Ribbons laughed in a silvery peal of derision.

"He means his mother. He's tied to his mother's apron-strings." She teased him with her eyes, her ribbons, her lips; flouted him with a toss of her head; and taunted him by a light blow on the arm with her jingling tambourine. The tinsel and glass jewellery frolicked about her in the mocking candlelight.

"Come and be a champion, Blue Birdseye," she scoffed. "You shall wear my ribbons at your garters, and sell 'em for a guinea each to the swells at the ringside. Come and be a champion among the milling coves."

At which Jem Burn chuckled up his long pipe, and the Newcastle Youth guffawed. Bendigo smoothed his blue birdseye, and his temper together.

"I'll be satisfied wi' the couple of sovereigns Mr. Burn owes me," he retorted, an answer that made the old prize fighter eye his pipe thoughtfully. The sparkle and dimples went out of the girl's face as the laughter dances out of champagne. All the exuberance gone, she tore her way sullenly through the baize curtain. They heard the crash of the tambourine as she threw it down inside.

"Think it over, my lad," said Jem Burn, still eyeing his pipe. "Come and be one of us while the fair's on."

"I'll knock his flaming head off if he does," the Newcastle Youth repeated, and followed his sister into the booth.

"That nevvie of mine will never learn to treat people with civility," Jem Burn muttered regretfully.

What he would have said further was interrupted by a scream from Cherry Ribbons inside the booth. Bendigo slipped through the old baize curtain and as Jem Burn followed on his heels the Newcastle Youth came floundering against him, breaking his pipe off short.

"Here what's all this?" he growled side-stepping his nephew and letting him pitch to the ground.

The girl was on fire with fury, her eyes blazing and cheeks burning.

"He struck me," she stormed, "and Blue Birdseye went for him and nearly knocked his flaming face in as he deserved."

The Newcastle Youth picked himself up, stood unsteadily on his feet and said thickly,

"I'll knock both their flaming heads off." At which Jem Burn took his coat off, and, looking sleeker than ever in a moleskin waistcoat, stood between his nephew and niece.

"My lad," he said to the former, "learn to keep your temper, and learn to keep your hands off a woman, and be civil and respectful to people—as is only right and reasonable. I've always treated everyone I've met with civility, and when I've had to knock a man down I've done it with all due respect and civility. Now you go to bed, my lad, or I shall give you a thundering good hiding and a lesson in civility at the same time."

The old prize fighter had such an uncivil look in his eye at the moment that the Newcastle Youth slunk sullenly into a corner of the booth out of the candle-light.

Jem Burn picked up part of his broken pipe and pondered on it; then he beckoned Bendigo through the baize curtain.

"I'd better pay you the money I owe you," he said, putting two sovereigns in his hand. "It'd only lead to bad blood if you came here. So with all civility we'll call it square, and good-night to you my lad."

"Good-night, Mr. Burn," said Bendigo, and won-

dered if the old pugilist had seen Cherry Ribbon slip out on the other side of the curtain. She stood waiting for him by the steps of the caravan, which had a candle burning inside.

"How can I express my gratitude to a young man who would not have a cherry ribbon from my hair as a keepsake?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"I thought it was a trick to cheat me of the five pounds," Bendy admitted.

"Well, so it was. One of Uncle Jem's little tricks. He's full of them, and I'm a little cheat. He wanted me to offer you a kiss when you demanded your five pounds. You wouldn't have taken it?"

"No, I wouldn't," Bendy said stolidly.

"I know you wouldn't, and I wouldn't have given it you. If Uncle Jem had turned me out into the street I wouldn't have kissed you yesterday. But I've changed my mind about it to-night."

Her warm lips suddenly set his face tingling and with a laughing "Good-night," she ran up the steps of the caravan.

The door opened—there was a gap of yellow light, and then darkness as it closed behind her. He went home with the girl's kiss burning on his mouth as no man's knuckles had ever done. His mother was at the door looking out for him.

"I've got the money, mother," he said.

"Glory be! I never expected you'd see the color of it. No, I won't take another shilling out of the fists as won it. But I'll lock the door with a contented mind now you've come home lad. For there's drunkards and wantons in the street at night during fair time."

When Bendy took off his coat upstairs, he found a cherry ribbon in one of the pockets. It was from her hair. He took it up and pressed it to his lips.

But as he came to undo the blue silk birdseye, he stood some time thinking, as Jem Burn had done over his broken pipe. A candle was burning. He put the cherry ribbon in the flame of it and watched it consumed inch by inch. And so Bendigo burned Cherry Ribbon's first kiss in the candle.

CHAPTER III

ENTER THE DUKE OF LIMBS

A SPRINGY bit of grass grew against an old smock windmill on the Lings. It was none too velvety, being coarsened with a mixture of gorse and heather that climbed uphill, but so secluded that disturbed rabbits scurried off when Sam Turner and his novice began to rough it about and trample on it as they went for one another with the gloves. The morning was bright and open and the familiar thud of leather attracted a gentleman of the Fancy to the spot.

"Egad! Here's Sam Turner giving a boxing lesson," he muttered as he took cover and popped his quizzing-glass to his eye, a Corinthian mannerism he had brought with him from many a notable ringside. After watching them spar with the air of a connoisseur he amended his conclusion. "No, I'm dashed if he's giving the lesson. Egad, he's taking it from his pupil. I'd better let them know I'm here before Sam goes to grass."

He stood on the gorse and heather-clad mound upon which the smock windmill was built, so tall of stature, and of such a breadth of body, he threw a heavy shadow down on them.

"What are you two doing in my duchy?" he demanded.

On his part, Bendigo was taking stock of the big man, and wondering if Gentleman Jackson's claret-colored coat could ever have accommodated his breadth of shoulder.

"Is he the owner of the Lings, the race course, and the windmills, then?" Bendy countered.

"Why, as for the windmills and the race course, I let them out to the wind and the racing stewards," laughed the big man with a flourish of his malacca cane. "But in the matter of the Lings I survey it from Ramsdale House on the Calverton road, and my right there is none to dispute. Introduce me, Sam."

"His Grace the Duke of Limbs," Sam Turner said, with the greatest show of respect. "This is my novice, Duke, a promising young fellow known as Bendigo."

The Duke wore a badger-gray beaver hat, a fashionable stock, a green coat with pewter buttons, a flowered waistcoat, leather riding breeches, and shining top boots. He must have been well over six feet in height, but the most remarkable thing about him was the prodigious development of his arms and legs. Standing beside the broken-down windmill, he looked as if in an outburst of rage he might have torn the sails off it and battered in the timbers with his fists.

Making elegant use of his malacca cane, which he handled like a buck of the period, the Duke came down from the hill of heather and stood beside them. "Go on with it," he said laconically.

So they went on with it, Mr. Joseph Whitaker watching the progress of events through his quizzing-glass, and congratulating himself on having discovered a young peregrine who might pull some feathers out of the highfliers as Fettle Porter had predicted.

"What do you say to him, Duke?" Sam Turner eventually ventured to ask. He was hot and flustered and none too happy, but sneakingly proud of having been punched about by his novice.

The Duke of Limbs flourished his malacca cane.

"All I have to say is to suggest that we go over to the Jolly Miller and make one another's closer acquaintance. I do not know where you will find a better

example of a living signboard than old Tom Gamston. He is a sack of flour heavier than any man of my acquaintance."

The landlord proved, indeed, to be a man of such extreme corpulence that he could not go down into his own cellar, and as he carried on the trade of a miller he stood for his own sign and could not have been improved upon by paint or putty.

"So you would become one of the milling blades?" said the Duke of Limbs to Bendigo when they had gathered round three stone mugs in the alehouse parlor. "Well, for a young man who can use his fists, I know nothing better. It's the life to have a sweet bit of turf under your feet and the ropes and stakes round you. Had I not been born into an estate—though, by Gad, moneylenders' bills rise at me from every acre of it like partridges—I might have shied my castor into the ring."

The Duke gave a jaunty tilt to his badger-gray beaver.

"I carry a bag of guineas in one pocket and a brace of pistols in the other," he continued. "My friends command my purse, my enemies have their choice of the pistols. As Sam Turner's novice I count you amongst the former, and if ever you lack a few guineas for a side-stake call upon Joseph Whitaker, at Ramsdale House."

"His Grace of Limbs," chuckled the fat landlord over his clay pipe. "And now, young man, what's your fighting color?"

"The blue birdseye," said Bendy, proudly displaying his spotted silk neckerchief.

"There never was a better fighting mixture than that," the Duke declared, "for 'tis the pride of the old prize ring. And now, lad, what's your name?"

"William Thompson, but I fight under the name of 'Abednego.'"

The three men sat looking at each other as stolidly silent as their stone mugs.

The Duke of Limbs was the first to speak.

"By Gad, Sam, that will never do," he said.

Shaking his head ominously, Sam Turner emptied his mug.

"No, Duke, it wain't," said the fat landlord following suit.

"I'll fight under that name or none other, Duke," said Bendy stubbornly. "If you don't like it, there's an end of backing me. I'll not change my name or my colors to suit any man."

"Well, if I don't like your name I like your spirit, and as it won't get into print until you've fought a good man, we'll let the matter stand over," said Whitaker. "Fill 'em up again, Tom, and we'll drink success to the young man with the old blue birdseye." And so Bendigo found a backer at the sign of the Jolly Miller.

The Duke of Limbs with his great width of shoulder, handsome side-whiskers, foppish quizzing-glass, bluff manliness, and Corinthian manners was a true type of Midland sporting squire of his period. When he twirled an eye it flashed like flint and steel and his mellow voice would rise on occasion into a gust of wind that swept opposition before it like autumn leaves. He was taken with Bendigo and the way he had shaped against Sam Turner.

"My lad," he said frankly, "I'm interested in you, and I'd like to see more of you, and if you do credit to the old blue birdseye you need never lack a guinea or a backer." He gave them both an invitation to visit him at Ramsdale House before mounting a big bay horse which had been put up at the Jolly Miller.

"I saw you and your novice going down towards the smock mill," he told Sam Turner, "else I should have been at the Flying Horse Inn before now. But I thought something was in the wind, and followed you. The smack of the leather soon told me where to find you. Bring your novice over to see me, Sam, on Wednesday, and I'll try what I can do with him myself."

"My lad, you're in clover," Sam Turner declared. "I never saw Joe Whitaker take to a man so quick. But nobody'll ever get me to believe the Duke could squeeze his shoulders into that old coat they say belonged to Gentleman Jackson. Talk about stag-horns, why he's got the spread of a buf-fal-o! My lad, you're a-coming on!"

"Glory be!" cried Bendigo's mother, when she heard the news. "You'll show a fine feather amongst the Fancy yet, as Fettle Porter said. A young man wi' the blue birdseye round his neck could never hope for a better backer than the Duke o' Limbs. Why, he had a hunting song made up about him when he rode to Squire Muster's hounds. 'And mind you he's a fine English gentleman, too. You mun keep the birdseye clean and sweet an' never be afraid o' nowt, not even death, Bendy."

"Abednego was not afraid of a fiery furnace. They cast him with Meshach and Shadrach into the midst of the flames, but they were unhurt. Not a hair of their heads was scorched, nor a hole burned in their coats or stockings. Three at a birth came to me, and I would have named you all from the Scriptures—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But your father would not have the names given in for the christening. Still, I have always called you Bendy, and always shall. Be not afraid of a fiery furnace, Abednego,

my son! For a young man wi' the blue birdseye round his neck there's nowt but God to be afraid on."

At Ramsdale House, Bendigo had a set-to with the Duke, the bottleholder, if required, being Sam Turner.

"Don't be afraid of drawing the cork, my lad," Joe Whitaker said as he donned the gloves.

Now he possessed the finest Corinthian nose Bendigo had ever seen, as well as the heaviest fist he had ever encountered, and Bendy avoided both with a dexterity that aroused the righteous indignation of their owner. At first the Duke bristled. Then he hit out. But the result was always the same. He either found Bendigo on the other side of where he had been or the whole thing was hallucination and he had never been there at all.

"Oh, dammit! why the devil don't you stand up to me, my lad!" he growled.

"That's what I am doing, squire," Bendy grinned with all due respect and civility as Jem Burn would have said.

"Egad! So he is, Sam," the Duke chuckled. "At least I'm not aware that I've knocked him down so far; although this should do the trick." But Bendy did the trick instead, or rather the mere flick of leather taking a heavy man off his balance may have done it. It is not easy to explain exactly how it happened, but there was his Grace of Limbs in a sitting posture.

"Oh, damn!" he said, taking the gloves off. "You try what you can do, Sam. I can't hit him, and he insists on French polishing my face with a rub of chamois leather instead of hitting me. In my opinion this young man knows more than you'll ever teach him."

"I'm afraid he does, Duke," Sam Turner admitted, shaking his head mournfully after a stiff set-to. "I'm hanged if I know which of us is the novice."

"I'll tell you what it is, Sam," the Duke chuckled. "This novice of yours is out of his novitiate, and being a promising bull-pup we'd better find him something to put his teeth in. It won't hurt him if he gets his ears bit at first. But it's time he made the acquaintance of the Fancy."

Now Bill Atkinson, the fighting snip, and his rival, Sam Merriman, were shining lights of the first magnitude at that time, and some rare turn-ups took place on Bagthorpe Common and Bulwell Forest where the ling grew luxuriantly enough to provide a feather-bed for the Fancy. Bendigo began to flutter his blue birds-eye amongst them and tyke after tyke was set at him to bite his ears. But none of them proved equal to it, and in the name of Abednego he won ten good fights without losing a single battle.

After his match with Bill Winterflood, on Bulwell Common, Joe Whitaker handed him a copy of *Bell's Life*, containing an account of the fight.

"They've printed your name, 'Bendigo' here," he said. "It's a good name, too. I should keep to it if I were you, my lad."

Bendy took the paper to his mother, who was fine and proud of what it said about him.

"'Bendigo' let it be," she said. "It's as bonny a fighting name as the blue birdseye is a fighting fogle:

"Says Cribb 'My color's the blue birdseye,'
As proud of it as the Mogul.
The blue birdseye, the true birdseye,
Was Tom Cribb's fighting fogle."

His Grace the Duke of Limbs occupied the chair at the next meeting of the Nottingham Fancy, held at the Lion and Unicorn. The landlord, a sporting publican, named Jephson, had tried to honor his pugilistic patrons by copying Tom Cribb's parlor from a

London print, and as the Duke was the only Corinthian present worthy of the name, the bruisers and their backers paid him all due deference.

The occasion was the night following Bendigo's match with a young blacksmith, known to fame as the Bingham champion. It proved a one-sided affair, the blacksmith being knocked down time after time, and if the ring had not been pitched on a bit of good turf he might have come to harm. As it was, his friends grew tired of picking him up from the grassy anvil, and advised him to "keep to shoeing hosses" in the future.

"I'll have another mugful while I'm here," the belligerent blacksmith declared. But his Bingham backers took him across to have it at the Barley Mow, after skying the sponge in token of defeat. The pick of the Nottingham men were lightweights at that period, and Bendy, in the heavier class, stood alone with Sam Turner, now an old-timer, although he would not admit it. Sam, however, knew Bendy was a better man than he had ever been, and stoutly declared he would live to see him wear the champion of England's belt.

"I hope we shall all do that," Joe Whitaker said, blowing a cloud from his long clay pipe, "but it won't be won by beating Bingham champions."

"I've heard there's a good big 'un at Hucknall," said Sam Merriman.

"I've something to say on that matter, Sam," Joe Whitaker continued. "When you told me about him before, I asked Jack Ridsdale's opinion, and as it more than bore out what had been told you, I drove over to Hucknall with him. I saw the young man, and I can assure you, one and all, gentlemen, he is the king-pin of the village green at wrestling and boxing."

"He's the man for Bendigo," cried the assembled sportsmen in one voice.

"Egad! hold on a minute," Whitaker interrupted. "He stands just under six feet three, and his fighting weight is anything between fourteen and fifteen stone. What has Bendigo to say to that? Let's hear him for himself."

Bendy rose, grinned all round, and bowed to the chairman. "If that's the case, Duke, he's more my man than ever!"

There was a roar of applause that rocked the room. And in this way the Nottingham Fancy first heard of Ben Caunt.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHTING TINMAN

THE sun was setting on a long summer day, and the flame and purple dying out of gorse and heather. The Duke had been out with a gun, which was under his arm, whilst Bendigo carried a mixed game bag over his shoulder. On coming into the highroad they heard a fiddle. There was a horse at grass beside the roadside, and the fiddle was going inside a van, which stood wheel-deep in heather. A lurcher came from under it to bark at them.

"By the fiddle, that should be the Fighting Tinman," Whitaker said. "He and his son are travelling tinkers, you know, whilst his wife and daughter make butchers' skewers and baskets. They are all gypsies. In his younger days the Fighting Tinman was the hero of a three-hour mill on Mousehole Heath, in Norfolk. They say a thousand spectators gathered before the fight ended, and, after he had beaten his man, the Tinman fiddled round the ring."

But Bendy scarcely heard what the Duke said, for the caravan, standing on the heath, took his thoughts back to Cherry Ribbons and Jem Burn's boxing booth. The fiddle stopped with a jarring discord. Somebody peered at them from a little window, and a young Romany came to the open door at the top of the steps. He had a black eye, a cut lip, and a swollen face. He looked at them, scowled, and slunk inside the caravan again.

"It's Jasper, the Tinman's son, and egad! by the look of him he's met his master," said the Duke.

Bendigo's day-dream faded amidst the glimmering

gorse. A dark-featured man, whose black hair was greasy, long, and streaked with gray, emerged from the caravan, and came down its steps to them. This must be the Fighting Tinman himself. His face was in a worse condition than the young gypsy's, and upon one ear, which had swollen to a cauliflower size, a silver earring gleamed incongruously. The marks were recent, and there must have been a stiff mill at no great distance from the caravan.

"I knew your fiddle," laughed the Duke.

"And I your size," laughed the Romany. "By the goss on the heath," said I, "'tis none other than his Grace of Limbs."

"I welcome you back to my green duchy of gorse and ling. Bring your fiddle out, Tinman, and let us hear a Romany tune."

"Nay, Duke, I cannot hold it under my chin with any comfort," was the growling rejoinder. "Who's the young man?"

"A friend of mine, who belongs to the milling blades."

"Well, if he's got any sense in his head he'll keep away from dirty Hucknall," the Fighting Tinman said, fingering his face ruefully. "There's a young game-keeper in the village called Big Ben. Look what he's done to me, who milled Black Oakland after a three hour's turn up on Mousehole Heath. I fancied Jasper one of the best amongst the young chals. But he played no better tune than my old fiddle, against Big Ben."

"How the blazes could you expect me to mill him?" a sullen voice called from the caravan. "He's six feet three and a good four stone heavier than me."

"There's only one man in Hucknall who answers to your description," said Joe Whitaker, "and that's Ben Caunt."

"That's the swine," the Fighting Tinman growled. "He milled me in ten rounds, but he wouldn't have done it so easy if I'd met him in the green days, when I fought Black Oakland on Mousehole Heath. He milled Jasper first, and I thought he'd broken the lad's neck, for he threw him over his shoulder amongst the bracken, and the women had him propped against the van wheel trying to bring him round, and spitting curses out at the big gorgio. The Squire's game-keeper stood by with a grin on his face and a gun in his hand, to see fair play as he called it. If my darter could have got behind him with a stone, he'd have had it. All they'd got against us was a rabbit that they'd seen the dog nip up in one of the fields, and bring to the caravan. They ordered us on to the road, and though the women threw sods at 'em, we had to go."

"I must go to Hucknall as a poacher, Duke," said Bendy. "Then you'll see if this big 'un can give me a milling."

"I'd keep away from dirty Hucknall if I were the young man," said the Tinman. "But that's his kettle to mend. After this I shall keep to tinkering pots and pans myself, it's all my old fists are fit for."

"Give him a couple of fat conies to grease the pots with," laughed the Duke. Bendigo foraged among the fur and feathers in the game bag and, after taking a brace of excellent rabbits up the steps to the caravan, the Tinman returned to them with his fiddle and a bottle of what he called heather honey. The Duke's flask being empty they tried it and found that it was creamy old stuff that had the honey and scent of the heather in it, but so strong that it could never have been brought home by bees in a strict state of sobriety.

The fiddle was full of heather honey, too. The Tinman fetched old tunes out of it like bees out of a

hive, and each one seemed sweeter than the other, until Bendigo wondered to himself how a gypsy tinker could fiddle with such a fine bow.

The moon was up when the Tinman left off fiddling and bade them good-night, the silver ring gleaming in his thick ear as they saw the last of him.

"We'll walk over to Hucknall, although it's late for country people to be about, and try to arrange a match at the Coach and Six," said the Duke. "Ben Butler keeps the Coach. He's Ben Caunt's uncle, and there's a close at the back of the inn with an old-fashioned badger box in it. That gave me the idea of this moonlight expedition. If we can only get Jack Ridsdale and a few Hucknall sportsmen together by a subterfuge all will be well. I am convinced that the landlord of the Coach and Six has a good backing for young Ben. He could put up a twenty-five guinea side-stake without taking any of the silver lining out of his own purse, and I like a man's friends and neighbors to show they have confidence in him."

"They'll take us for poachers," Bendigo grinned as they walked across the moonlit heath with gun and game bag. They found the houses of Hucknall unlighted except for the moon on their windows.

"By Gad! They're all asleep," Whitaker said. "We shall have to wake some of 'em up."

They went down the lane, and a few doors below the blacksmith's shop was the Coach and Six. To their satisfaction there was yellow candlelight still moving inside it, and a heavy knock brought Ben Butler to the door. He stood with his candle behind it, asking who was there.

"But whoever it may be," he yawned, "I'm not going to open my door again to-night."

"Then I'll not tell you who I am, Mr. Butler," said

the Duke mysteriously, "but I've heard there's a jack badger hereabouts, and I thought you might care to bait it on the green at the back of the Coach and Six."

"That'll draw the bolt, if not the badger," he said in an aside to Bendy. But he was wrong. Ben Butler was more agape than his door.

"I'm always ready to entertain a badger at any reasonable time, but I won't even talk about it at this ungodly hour o' night. Bring it over in good time to-morrow and if there's any bite in 'em I'll pay for its teeth."

"I'll hand in a couple of rabbits if you'll open the door," said the Duke.

"I wouldn't open it to a brace of pheasants. But you can bring the badger."

"At noon to-morrow—then."

"That's as good a time as any. I'll have the badger box cleaned out, and a few good sportsmen ready with their dogs."

They left him on the right side of his door, and called on Mr. Ridsdale, whose dogs soon fetched him down by the commotion they caused.

"Oh, confound it all, Duke," he complained. "What an unaccommodating time of night to fetch a man out of his bed."

"It's worth it," laughed Whitaker. "There's a badger-baiting to take place at the Coach and Six to-morrow—time, twelve o'clock sharp."

"But I was at the Coach till Ben Butler closed his door, and heard nothing of it."

"Egad! The badger to be baited is none other than his own overgrown nephew. Let me introduce you to a young man who will undertake to bait Ben Caunt with the gloves, if you can persuade Ben to put 'em on."

"Why, he's the man I saw fight the Bingham champion."

"True, and he's good enough to fight the Hucknall champion and beat him, as he did the Bingham one."

"Ben's too big for him," Ridsdale said. "I'm sorry to say it, but your man doesn't stand a chance. Still, to satisfy you and him, I'll arrange for Ben to be there. It's a lot easier to persuade him to put the gloves on than to take 'em off again."

"So you think Bendigo stands no more chance against Ben than your little terrier bitch would against a jack badger, supposing we could put one in Ben Butler's box to-morrow?" Whitaker said, holding up a glass of wine his friend had poured out.

"What's that?" Ridsdale snapped. "Why, I'll back Nell to draw any badger ever boxed."

"There you go," Whitaker laughed. "Like every good sportsman you back your fancy, regardless of size. There are a hundred of us ready to back Bendigo against any man in the Midlands, also regardless of size—Ben Caunt preferred."

Bendy stood by as silent as the Duke was loquacious. Ridsdale glanced from one to the other in the candle-light. Then he filled the glasses again and clinked his with the Duke's.

"I see, you want to bring these two men together in the ring. Well, it shouldn't be difficult, as Ben Butler is anxious for his nephew to become a bruiser, and if you're still of the same mind after they've had a bout with the gloves, I'll do what I can to arrange it."

CHAPTER V

AT THE SIGN OF THE COACH AND SIX

A YOUNG man with a blue birdseye was picked up at Three Lane Ends early next morning by Joe Whitaker in a yellow-wheeled gig. The gig was as well brushed as the Duke's side-whiskers, the paint as bright as his Hunt buttons, the chestnut cob as fresh as the morning.

"What have you got in that green baize bag, my lad?" quizzed the Duke.

"Only a couple of bull-pups to set at the badger, Squire."

Whitaker laughed on finding that the baize bag contained Bendigo's boxing gloves, and they took the Hucknall road.

"The gypsies are still here," the Duke said as they approached the van on the heathside. "I wonder if the Tinman would like to come with us to Hucknall."

The young Romany was sitting at a bucket of fire as sulky as his soldering iron, mending kettles and iron pots. The caravan was little better than a travelling cart made wind and weathertight by a hooped awning, and the lurcher came snarling from between its wheels as the gig drew up.

"Will you have a lift on the road to Hucknall, Tinman?" asked the Duke. "There's to be a badger-baiting at the Coach and Six."

Apparently the invitation was not entirely unexpected.

"I've heard about it, Duke," said the Tinman.

"Egad! how?"

"The goss on the heath whispers its tales."

"Then, begad, the goss is on a false scent, for the badger's big Ben Caunt."

"And the dog that will draw him wears a blue birdseye," laughed the Tinman. "His teeth are lus knuckles."

"'Tis not to be with the bare hands," said the Duke.

"Then I'll not waste clean silver on dirty Hucknall," said the Tinman spitting at the name. But there was sport in the brown hide and big bones of him, and he might as well have tried to keep the lurcher out of a dog fight as himself from going over to Hucknall in the Duke's gig. He entered into conversation with his wife, and appeared to be asking for money to back Bendigo with. But she shook her head until her heavy gold earrings flashed. The daughter was then called, and the three of them conversed in animated Romany.

"Shall I tell your fortune, Duke?" asked the gypsy girl, coming up to them with her head in a patchwork shawl.

This was clearly a ruse to raise money to put on Bendigo. As generous as he was good-natured, the Duke of Limbs crossed her palm with silver, but requested her to tell Bendigo's fortune instead of his own.

In spite of the shawl, Bendigo could see the Tinman's swarthy-skinned and dark-eyed daughter was young and comely, and her resemblance to Cherry Ribbons startled him. It may be she read his thoughts, for, taking his hand, she pored over the palm and said in a low tone of voice:

"There's a lass you've parted from who often thinks of you and you of her. You'll see her again. Ay, she'll lure you to her, lad, wi' her bright eyes and pretty ribbons."

The words amazed Bendigo, for they pictured up

Cherry Ribbons as he saw her at the fair, dancing on the show front.

"What's she telling you, Bendy," Joe Whitaker asked, with an indulgent smile for what he considered to be only mummary.

There was a dreamy expression upon the gypsy girl's face, her dark eyes closed languidly and flashed open again like jewels in a velvet casket.

"I'm telling him that he'll be the champion of England afore he's many years older," she predicted. "I have the second sight, and I can see him wearing the champion's belt.

"Don't forget that you're only wearing the old blue birdseye yet, and it's a long way from it to the champion's belt," Joe Whitaker advised Bendy. "My own opinion is that destiny gives a man the things he fights hardest for. I make no claim upon having second sight, but I've seen and known a good deal of the world at first hand."

When they arrived on the scene, there was considerable excitement at the Coach and Six, for Ben Butler had spread the news abroad, and sportsmen of all sorts and conditions had assembled with their dogs.

"I didn't know it was you, Duke," said Ben Butler, apologetically, "or I'd have opened my door to you last night. But where's the badger?"

"Egad! that's the fun of it," laughed Joe Whitaker. "If you had opened your door you might have dispensed with all these dogs."

"I supposed you'd bring a badger wi' you."

"If I haven't brought the badger, I've brought a good and willing lad with me," said the Duke. "Didn't you say you were ready to back your nephew against any lad in the county with knuckles or gloves?"

"I may have done, and whether I did or not don't

signify much," Ben Butler said proudly, "for here he stands ready to box any man in the company for a five pun note."

"Does he, by Gad?" cried Whitaker, stepping forward. "Then we've got the man for him. This is Bendigo of Nottingham, who has fought ten good fights, and never been defeated."

Ben Butler looked disconcerted at his challenge being taken up before it was well out of his mouth. But a glance at the young man with the blue birdseye reassured him. For Bendigo was dwarfed between the broad-shouldered Duke of Limbs and the young giant in velveteens.

"Let 'em put the gloves on," mine host of the Coach and Six said contentedly. "I'll wager a five pun note that Ben knocks him down three times in ten minutes."

"Done," replied the Duke, producing his pocket wallet. "Mr. Ridsdale will act as stakeholder."

"Happy to oblige," the Hucknall sportsman said, "but I'm afraid I can't back your man, Whitaker. My money's on Ben Caunt."

A smile flitted across Bendigo's features.

"I'm going to get my backers a good price, Duke," he said in a low voice. "He may down me twice, but he won't down me for the third time. Get him in the ring with the raw 'uns, and I'll mill him, Duke. Not here. But he'll be a bear wi' a sore head by the time I've done wi' him all the same."

There was nobody present on the green who knew anything of Bendigo except Jack Ridsdale, who had seen him make hay of the Bingham champion without being much impressed.

"Where's the Nottingham lad's other backers,

Duke?" Ben Butler asked. "Is the gypsy chap one on 'em?"

"That's as he likes," Whitaker said, "but he's not from Nottingham."

"He's nowt but a poacher," Ben Caunt declared. "I gen him a dressin' down the other day, and turned him off Rough Common for takin' rabbits. I'll say this for him, though, he can feight. He gied me some good 'uns afore he gen in."

"I'm the only one of Bendigo's Nottingham backers here," Whitaker said. "But if he wins this stake we're ready to wager £25 that he beats Ben Caunt with bare knuckles in a twenty-four foot ring—both men to go in training for the fight."

"I'll talk about that later on, Duke," Ben Butler said. "We'll have the lads stripped to the buff and see how they shape. Make a ring, gentlemen, and let's get at it."

They "buffed" in the thick of the crowd. If there was a finer man in England at that time than Ben Caunt he was not to be found in the Midlands. Ben stood 6ft. 2½in. in his stockings, weighed close on 15 stone, and had the frame of a Hercules. His skin was as white as a woman's and his muscles bulged like a blacksmith's about his chest, shoulders, and arms.

Bendigo's points were much less spectacular than his rival's. A modern admirer has said of him—"half of him was whalebone, half of him was steel." That description can scarcely be improved upon. The whalebone line ran from the haunch to the headpiece; the steel from the heel to the hip. He was in the pink of condition, and his supple body rippled with health.

Ben Butler brought out the gloves that his nephew generally used. They were smeared with dark stains, as if they had been productive of that fine old vintage

known among the Fancy as "the claret." From their size and hardness, as Ben Caunt slapped them together, one would have imagined they had been provocative of a display of cauliflower ears in the neighborhood of Hucknall Torkard.

The gigantic young gamekeeper received an ovation from his friends and admirers, who altogether ignored Bendigo.

There was only one man in it from Jack Ridsdale's point of view.

"Well, what do you think of him?" he asked, leaving Ben Caunt, and coming over to his friend.

"I'm vastly impressed with his appearance," the Duke of Limbs admitted, quizzing the young gamekeeper over. "If he's anything as good as he looks, I shall leave more money at Hucknall than I can spare. But is he?"

"You've brought the wrong man with you to ask him that question." Ridsdale laughed.

"No, I'm hanged if I have," Whitaker replied, his loyalty to Bendigo unswerving and unshaken.

They sparred for an opening. Ben Caunt swung a tremendous blow with an arm flung out like the swipple of a flail. Bendy ducked it and landed a rib-bender that left a sullen patch of red impressed on the white skin.

"Nettled, begad!" the Duke muttered to himself.

There must have been sting in it, too, for the big white body flinched from the waist-line up. Ben gave a quick look of surprise, grinned, rushed at Bendy, and swung his right again. Bendigo stepped in and out like lightning. There was a thud between the quick movements, and Ben Caunt seemed to have been handed a bouquet. When he rubbed his nose on the back of one of the gloves, he found his claret had been tapped. He also heard the Duke of Limbs tap his

snuff-box and call across to Ridsdale, "First blood to Bendigo, begad!"

Ben Caunt rubbed his nose again, and, dashing at Bendigo, chopped down his guard with a hacking left. Then he drove his right glove into Bendigo's face. Bendy was apparently lifted through the air by the force of the blow. He turned a complete somersault on the grass, but it is wise to remember that he was an expert at performing all kinds of acrobatic tricks. The Fighting Tinman, who was watching things very closely, saw him grin as he lay spread-eagled on the grass, and, being an old pugilist, he formed the opinion that Bendigo, having turned the blow off, was "fox-ing." But the crowd cheered Ben Caunt as if he was already the winner. Caunt had won the first round under three minutes. The Duke picked Bendigo up. He seemed stunned by the terrific force of the blow, but he still retained consciousness enough to screw one eye up and wink deliberately at his backer, who did not appreciate this bit of by-play at its true face value.

"Your man did better than I expected, Joe," Ridsdale admitted, "but he's as groggy as a keg of Old Tom. I'll lay three to one against him."

Ben Butler was waiting for Squire Ridsdale to make the price.

"Three to one on my nevvvy," he cried.

Remembering what Bendy had said, the Duke made no reply to Ridsdale.

"Three to one on Ben Caunt," repeated the landlord of the Coach and Six.

"I'll take that in crowns," the Tinman said, handing out five shillings.

The crowd around Ben Butler laughed loud at the gypsy, who was Bendigo's only backer. They thought

he was backing him because of the hiding he had received on Rough Common at the hands of the young gamekeeper. The second round was of about the same duration, but Bendy did little beyond duck and dodge to avoid punishment. Finally, Ben Caunt got him in a hold and threw him as he might have done a log of wood.

"That was a proper fall I gen him," he said, still rubbing at his nose with the back of a glove. As Bendigo lay stretched out on the turf Whitaker and the Tinman helped him up. The gypsy smiled at the easy way in which he half sprang to his feet. But his Grace of Limbs was too much agitated to be reassured even by Bendigo's whispered "I'm all right, Duke."

"I'll lay four to one Ben Caunt beats him under the ten minutes," Ridsdale called out. The Tinman snapped him up with:

"I'll take that twice over, mister."

"In shillings," Ridsdale sneered, not caring to bet with a gypsy. He had flung the challenge at Whitaker, who was hanging back.

"No, in pounds, mister," the Tinman said, counting out a handful of silver. By ransacking his old velvet jacket he made up two pounds in silver. This he turned over to Ridsdale, who shovelled the money contemptuously into his pocket, without troubling to count it, or even glance through it.

"Begad, the gypsy's a sport," Whitaker cried in admiration. "I'll have ten pounds on Bendigo, Jack, if you'll take me."

"Only too pleased. Is there anyone else who fancies the Nottingham lad at four to one."

"I'll gie the same odds," Ben Butler cried manfully.

But there were no more takers. The two men set to for the third round, Ridsdale, Whitaker, and Ben Butler stood with their watches out timing the bout.

Ben Caunt made desperate attempts to knock Bendigo off his legs, but blow after blow was evaded, and Ben Butler turned more than a trifle pale.

"Time's nearly up, Ben," he sang out. "You'll ha' to gie him one to up-end him tidy soon to win."

Ridsdale also began to look embarrassed. The Tinman stood close to him as if waiting to collect his winnings. In their excitement the crowd commenced to close in on the boxers.

"Only half a minute to go," Mr. Ridsdale called out.

Ben Caunt saw his opportunity. The ring being restricted, Bendigo had less chance for head and foot-work. He would deal him a smashing blow at the last moment. He dashed forward, and for the first time in the fight Bendigo hit out. The blow, flush on the cheek-bone, not only stopped Ben Caunt, but staggered him and sent him reeling back against his supporters with a split face.

"Well, I'm domned," he growled. "I didn't think he had it in him."

"Time!" cried the Duke. Ridsdale snapped his gold hunting watch savagely. Ben Butler still stood staring at the dial of his watch vacantly. With a sigh, he thrust it into his fob, on realizing that time was indeed up, and his nephew had not quite done all that was expected of him. The Tinman was holding out his brown hand to the innkeeper, having already received payment from Ridsdale.

As Butler counted shilling after shilling into the gypsy's palm, Ben Caunt said:

"I ought to ha' lammed into him afore. But that smack he gen me was a proper good 'un. It fair flummoxed me. If you'd made it a quarter of an hour

instead of ten minutes, I should ha' won easy. I'll feight him again wi' fisses any time he likes."

"So you shall, my lad," Ridsdale declared.

"For £25 a side?" Joe Whitaker asked, addressing Ben Butler.

"I'll think about it," was the landlord's cautious reply.

"That won't do," the Duke said, shaking his head. "I must take either yes or no back with me."

"I'll give you my word the money will be forthcoming, Jack," Ridsdale promised.

"Then the match is on, and we'd better all have a friendly drink to celebrate it."

"This way, gentlemen," Ben Butler exclaimed, doing the honors of the inn with a good deal of pomp and circumstance, now Ridsdale had openly proclaimed himself as his nephew's backer. He hesitated about admitting the gypsy tinker, but the Duke beckoned to the Tinman, and, remembering he had a pocketful of silver, the landlord let him pass into the parlor of the Coach and Six.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE HEATHER LAUGHS

AS THE Tinman got up the yellow wheel of the Duke's gig on the other side of Bendigo, he declared that Hucknall was not so dirty now he had seen the shine of its money.

"I've won enough to rosin my old fiddle through the summer," he said contentedly. As they approached the caravan the dog barked loudly and the gypsies stood on the heathside cheering. The Duke popped up his glass.

"Egad! how do they know we've won?"

"By the wind and the goss on the heath."

"Oh, dammit, you can't make me believe the goss talks."

"The wind and the goss talk in whispers to them wi' long ears, Duke, such as conies and gypsies," the Tinman persisted. "They've heard the jingle of good silver from dirty Hucknall."

Anyway, they knew their money was coming back to them with interest and even Jasper lost his sullen demeanor. Standing by his burned-out bucket of fire he flourished an old kettle in a friendly manner, whilst the lurcher leaped up at the Tinman's bag of money as if it wore fur.

"Why, here's the coney that the dog smelt," laughed the Tinman. "By the goss on the heath I'll have a handful of silver on Young Blue Birdseye when he fights the big gamekeeper. The Blue Birdseye for the Rye!"

The cob had found a mouthful of dainty grass where the trap was standing, and on Bendigo's behalf

the Duke's ears were not deaf to the music in a handful of silver. There was an even more pleasant ring in the Tinman's words, "The Blue Birdseye for the Rye!"

If the Tinman talked to the goss and the goss talked to the Rye up and down the country a lot of gypsy money might find its way to the ringside. So the Duke got down from the trap to stretch his legs on the heath and Bendigo followed, for it was in his mind to have a word with the Tinman's daughter. Surely a young man flushed with success who has been promised by a pretty fortune teller that he shall be champion of England may be excused for wishing to hear more about it.

"A handful of silver on Bendigo," said the Duke.

"Egad! leave it with me, Tinman, and I'll look after your interests. I've been the bank for many a man's money and the only time I was threatened with losing it was when four footpads set upon me in a dark lane. Begad! how I rattled them with the stag-horn of my riding whip!"

The Tinman was already counting silver into the Duke's capacious hand.

"You won a fine bit of money for us, Blue Birdseye," said the Romany girl with a shawl of many colors round her head. She had come up to him over the trodden path in the heather. "You'll win more when you meet the big man in velveteens again. But we shan't be here to see the fight. The old roan that you see grazing over there will be on the road to-morrow. We're 'going up north where we came from, and I don't suppose we shall ever meet again."

The flash of her gypsy eyes made him think of Cherry Ribbons. Going about the north country in a caravan she might come across Jem Burn's pretty niece who hailed from Newcastle.

"It must be fine to travel about the country as you do," Bendigo said awkwardly.

"It is," she laughed. "To go singing down the green lanes by day and sleep on a heath at night. There's nothing finer. But only the true Rye have the way of it and the heart for it. You must be born a gypsy to go gaily down the road in wind and rain and heartache. But why am I saying all this to you instead of good-by? What did you want to ask me when I came up to you? For I saw plain enough that you would be speaking to me. My name is Zillah."

"I was thinking that you might meet with the lass who wore cherry ribbons—the lass you told me of when you read my palm," he said diffidently.

"Like enough, as I travel along the road. But who is she?"

"Jem Burn's niece. She wore cherry ribbons outside his boxing show at Nottingham Fair."

Zillah smiled a little sadly at him.

"She did not tell you that she was a gypsy?"

"No—she didn't tell me that."

"Or that her brother, the Newcastle Youth, was a travelling tinker by trade until he joined his uncle's boxing booth?"

Bendigo gaped at the girl standing by the caravan. She threw aside the shawl of many colors and stood laughing at him in bewildering beauty like a rich bundle that has come undone, the gypsy gee-gaws, glass beads and tawdry trinkets becoming her more than true jewels would a whiter skin. Because of the midnight gloom of her hair and her creamy sunburn the sparkle of many glass gems colored her young comeliness; her slim gypsyish body flashed and rippled with her shining dark eyes.

"Why, you must be Cherry Ribbons yourself," faltered Bendigo.

"Who else? But wind, sun, and rain on the dusty highway spoil a girl's youth and beauty."

"That is not true," he maintained, "because you are even prettier than ever."

"Have you just discovered it?"

"This is the first time I have had a good sight of you. You had a shawl round your head when you told me my fortune."

She smiled again.

"I am as full of craziness as a patchwork quilt. First I would hide me from you, and then would have you recognize me. You did not dream that I was a gypsy, living in a van?"

"No, but I thought you were still travelling with Jem Burn's boxing booth."

"Why, lad alive, have you not heard that he keeps the Queen's Head in the Haymarket now and has gone up in the world? He would like to flash me in the bar of his sporting drum, and one of these fine days when I grow tired of tinkers and fairs and the caravan on the heath I shall set off to London and maybe marry a swell gorgio. Who knows? But it will only be to leave him again, for the way of the road is the way of the Rye, man and woman. I am Zillah, the Tinman's daughter as you now know, Blue Birdseye. Jasper could never keep his temper long together, and by losing his temper he lost his fights. So when Uncle Jem sold the boxing booth there was only the open road for us, and that took us back to the Tinman's caravan where we had started from. I put a shawl round my head when I told your fortune, because I was at that time afraid you would recognize me as the girl who danced on the show front."

"I thought you were gypsyish looking like Cherry Ribbons, but I did not think of her as grown almost into a woman."

Her dark eyes laughed at him.

"Almost! Why, I am as tall as you—almost. But we have only met to part again, Blue Birdseye."

"I shall see you again, Cherry Ribbons."

"You had better not, or you may live to rue it."

"Then why did you kiss me that night in the fair?"

"To lure you back because I did not like losing you. I do not know myself why that was. All I know is that I walked for miles out of the town beside the caravan, with wet-shod feet, bewildered, cold, and in wretched loneliness, hoping that I should see you again. I was lonely then. I saw so many faces from the show front and had no friends. But now I have made friends again with the long green lane, the broad heath, and the open road. Why should you ever wish to see me again? Good-by?"

"Good-by, but all the same, some day I *shall* see you again."

"When you are champion of England—maybe Blue Birdseye. You are a bold young man, but you will burn your fingers if you warm them at a roadside fire. Think of me as Cherry Ribbons at the fair and not as Zillah, the wandering gypsy. Let my brother speak a word with you now. He has got over his sulkiness so far as to fetch the old fiddle out of the caravan."

There was the gay jig of a fiddle, and who should come skipping over the heather dancing to the tune he played on it, but Jasper, in a new velveteen jacket. Zillah laughing, threw the end of her shawl of many colors to Bendigo, and so they danced on the heath to Jasper's fiddling, with the gypsy patchwork between them.

"Egad! The young chal's a fiddler, too," said the Duke.

"A better fiddler than ever I was," the Tinman answered. "He learned it from laying on the heath and I from the laying on a blackthorn stick."

"When the heart is young, the feet are nimble," laughed the Duke, "and after all a sweet bit of heather is as good to dance on as to fight on."

"The heath is the hearth of the Romany Rye, Duke, and when it has dried itself in the wind and warmed itself in the sun it goes to sleep," said the Tinman, "and out of its sleep, like laughing dreams, spring the heather, the broom, and the goss. Let the young people dance when the heath dances and the old people mourn when the cold wind blows upon it."

When he had done with the fiddle-stick Jasper held out his hand to Bendigo.

"A'bit o' silver is better won than lost," he said, "and it makes a good plaster for old sores. Since you have danced to my fiddle, here's my hand, Blue Birdseye, and when you meet the big Hucknall gamekeeper in the ring, knock his flaming head off."

As they climbed into the gig the Tinman said to Bendigo:

"We leave the parish of dirty Hucknall to-morrow, but my silver will go to the ringside with you in the Duke's pocket, and I'll wear the blue birdseye on the day you fight Ben Caunt, my lad."

"If you're at the fight the Duke will give you back double money at the ropes," said the cocksure young man with the blue birdseye.

"We go the way of the road, but if it's the way to the fight all the better," said the Tinman.

Jasper fiddled a north-country lament on parting, and Zillah waved her shawl of many colors to them.

Then with a hoity-toity toss of her head she went up the steps of the caravan. But her dark eyes watched the yellow gig through a pane of bottle glass until a turn in the road took it from view, and all she saw was a mocking wilderness of flaming gorse and honey-haunted heather.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT AT APPLEBY

AS THE Duke's gig jingled down a narrow old thoroughfare known as Bunker's Hill, Bendigo jumped out, and turned into the back court, where his mother lived. She had been washing, for the dolly-tub stood at the door, and clothes were drying on a line suspended across the court from window to window.

"I've got back from Hucknall safe and sound, mother," he said.

"I see thou hast, lad," Mrs. Thompson said, coming to the open door. "What about Ben Caunt?"

"I'm matched against him for £25. The Duke's brought me back in his trap. He's come to arrange things at Mr. Jephson's."

But his Grace of Limbs loomed up behind Bendigo.

He raised his beaver hat, displaying a crop of reddish hair that matched his handsome side whiskers.

"You must keep Bendy from such stuff as this, mother, now he's in training," he said, handing over to her a bottle of "daffy" which he had brought from the Coach and Six.

"I'll see as he don't touch it, Duke. Not that I want it to keep my own spirits up, neither, for I knew well enough he'd beat Ben Caunt wi' the mufflers. But that's on'y feightin' in armchairs an' cushions. Wait till he lams into the big 'un wi' the raw 'uns. They waint know Ben Caunt next day as Hucknall Torkard."

"Begad, though, Ben's a Goliath," the Duke of Limbs ruminated.

"An' by God, Duke, there's your David," Mrs. Thompson cried, pointing with the bottle at Bendy. "Son o' mine, son that I've suckled, son that I'm looking forward in my age to see champion of England, beat Ben Caunt, or I'll smash yo' as I smash this."

She dashed the bottle on the cobblestones. It flew into thousands of splinters, and the "daffy" mingled with the dirty suds in the drain that ran from the alley pump.

Again the Duke raised his beaver hat, and taking Bendy's arm, said to him as they turned away:

"You've got a woman for your mother, my lad, and it behooves me to show the gentlemen of the Fancy that you've got a man for your backer."

The Duke drove up to the Lion and Unicorn. Bill Atkinson had left his goose and ironing-board, and Sam Merriman his lace frame, and they were playing skittles at the back to while away the time. Besides these notable Nottingham lightweights, a good sprinkling of the local Fancy had gathered together to hear how things had gone at Hucknall.

"The match between Bendigo and Ben Caunt is on at £25 a side," the Duke proclaimed, cracking his whip.

"Bendigo's matched wi' Ben Caunt. Gie the lad a cheer," the landlord called out.

"Gie the lad a drop of 'daffy' in a bottle for his mother," suggested Joe Whitaker. "That'll cheer both him and her."

"I'll take it round to her," Bendigo said.

He slipped off with the bottle.

"The Duke's sent another drop o' 'daffy' but don't christen the cobblestones wi' it this time."

"It did me more good than drinking it. An' don't you forget you ought to ha' been christened Abednego,

my son, an' although he wasn't afraid of a fiery furnace, London gin would ha' been blue ruin to him."

"I'll not touch it, mother."

"Nor any other spirits. You can't stan' up against them an' Ben Caunt, but you can feight both on 'em together, mind that."

"I'll mind it, mother."

When Sam Turner arrived at the Lion and Unicorn it was decided that he and the Duke of Limbs would train and look after Bendigo at the Green Dragon, Chilwell.

"We must have the Birmingham Fancy at the ringside to get our lad known, and stiffen the betting," Whitaker said. "I vote for the fight taking place at Jack Powell's house on the Ashbourne road."

"There isn't a better situated spot in the Midland," Sam Turner admitted. "It was there Dick F's colors were lowered by Harry Preston, of Birmingham. I saw the fight. It was a good fight, but a bad one for the Nottingham man's backers."

"Are you afraid of the same thing happening to Bendy's blue birdseye?"

"No, I'm not, Duke."

"Then we'll see what Jack Ridsdale has to say to the fight taking place on one of the pastures, where the Ashbourne road dips down against Appleby House."

The next day the Duke drove Bendigo over to Chilwell. When it became known that the Green Dragon harbored a prize fighter, there was woful shaking of heads among the wiseacres who congregated at the neighboring sign of the Blue Bell, which was kept by the parish clerk.

Inquisitive rustics who peered over the hedge of the close adjoining the Green Dragon were greeted by the sight of a man laying the grass with a swishing

scythe, which he honed skilfully and handled tirelessly, mowing swathe after swathe with a steady stroke which spoke well for his bodily strength. Could the man be the prize fighter from Nottingham? He was, and he worked in the hayfield till the sun went down upon him, till the sweep of his scythe had laid the last upstanding grass, and the day's work of two or three men was accomplished. This strenuous exercise toughened the muscles of Bendigo's back and shoulders, and the next day he was to be met walking with Sam Turner at a swinging pace along the country lane and footpaths, leaping any stiles or closed gates that came in the way. He sparred several times a day with Sam Turner, and put the gloves on with any of the Nottingham Fancy who came over to see him. The Duke's Limbs drove over to Chilwell morning by morning, regularly as clockwork, satisfying himself that his was conditioned for the coming contest.

On a bright July morning, the dust along thebourne road was raised time and again by traps, and conveyances approaching from opposite directions, and all making for the secluded old roadside inn known as Appleby House. While the morning was still young, a sufficient number of sportsmen from Nottingham, Hucknall, and Birmingham gathered together to guarantee the ringside would be well patronized. Ben Butler drove Ben Caunt, and his father, and Harry Bamford, his trainer, over from Hucknall. The Duke brought Bendigo and Sam Turner over from Chilwell, and the landlord of the Lion and Unicorn was amongst the early arrivals. Mr. Ridsdale arrived, tooling a stylish turnout of the curricule type, which contained Harry Potter, the Corinthian bookmaker, who carried on the traditions of the age of fops. His enormous white beaver hat, worn sideways, reminded

one of the palmiest days of the Regency, the sprigged waistcoat and ponderous seals at his fob being reminiscent of the same period. But Potter was an acquisition to any ringside, being a sportsman with a pocketful of money, who was willing to lay long odds. Meanwhile, under the direction of honest Jack Powell, the landlord, stakes and ropes had been fixed up in the meadow at the back of the house, where many hard-fought prize fights have taken place aforetime.

"The ring is ready," he announced. A Birmingham sportsman was appointed referee. He inspected the ring, which was a twenty-four foot square of good turf, enclosed by eight stakes and ropes in double lines, one two feet from the ground, and the other four feet from the ground. Satisfied that the ring was well and truly made, he had the "scratch" chalked out, and ordered principals and seconds into it.

Bendigo jumped over the ropes, whilst Ben Caunt took them in a stride, Ben Butler acted as his second, and Harry Bamford was bottleholder, Sam Turner seconded Bendigo, sponge in hand, and Sam Merriman carried the bottle.

Bendigo's first act was to give Sam Turner his silk handkerchief, which he at once tied to the centre stake, so that the old blue birdseye was the first color to flutter in the summer breeze. Ben Butler thereupon tied an orange-colored handkerchief underneath it, entwining the two colors.

Bendigo heard a familiar cracked voice calling out:

"Lives and battles of all the notable milling coves," and looked about for the shabby velvet cap of old Jerry, the walking stationer. But Jerry was wearing a glazed hat that made up in oddity what it lacked in nap when compared with Harry Potter's white beaver. It had belonged, he told Bendy when he

came over to him to the ropes, to a gentleman whip, who had given up coaching to marry an heiress. Jerry also wore the discarded red coat of one of his Majesty's mail guards.

"I heard of a fight being on in Leicestershire," he said, "and loving a prize fight as I do a fair or an execution, I made my way up to it, little thinking that the lad with the blue birdseye would be in the ring."

"Egad! Why not sell his colors, then?" said the Duke of Limbs, who was an interested listener to their conversation at the ropes.

"Sir, nothing will give me more pleasure. I have as great a liking for the lad as for the birdseye."

Bendigo handed Jerry a bunch of the birdseye ribbons, telling him to offer 'em at a guinea, and be sure not to take less than a shilling each for 'em. Jerry winked like the old stager he was, and surreptitiously drew a couple of nutmegs from a pocket of the mail-coachman's coat.

"I've never been without a meg in my pocket since I fettled the Prince Regent's porter," he said with another knowing wink. "Keep one in each fist, my lad. If Jem Belcher had kept a meg in each mawler when he hit Tom Cribb's hard nob, his hands would never have cracked up as they did. Nothing like a nutmeg to keep your hands from giving out."

"Begad! this will never do," the Duke said in horror. "Oh! dammit, no! he mustn't have anything in his hands, you know. Keep your confounded nutmegs to fettle porter with, my good fellow."

Old Jerry moved off in some dudgeon, but through the fight Bendigo heard him going round the ropes singing songs of the milling coves and selling the birdseye ribbons. Ben Caunt seemed to have every advantage, and when the toss gave his side the choice

of corners, Harry Potter shook his head ominously, until his enormous white hat slipped back and gave him an extraordinary appearance.

"My money's on the big 'un," he said, restoring its jaunty tilt to the beaver. That was exactly where the Nottingham Fancy wanted his money to be. Two umpires or timekeepers were chosen. The men stripped, were brought to the scratch from their corners, and shook hands. The seconds withdrew again into the corners, and the fight commenced. Besides the crowd gathered round the ropes, coaches, gigs, and traps crested the top of the field, the gates on the road having been broken down.

As Ben Caunt stood at the scratch in the pride of his young manhood, the summer sunshine shimmering on his white skin and bulging sinews through the green boughs of an oak that overhung the ring, Harry Potter said in admiration:

"By Gad, Ridsdale, it's a horse to a hen on Caunt. A finer man was never seen in the prize ring." Physically Ben Caunt deserved such appreciation. He towered over Bendigo, who stood right foot foremost, with his shoulder crouched and chin pressed low down, whilst Ben stood square set, his arms beginning to move like mill sails that felt the first stir of the wind. With his leg of mutton fists revolving he was getting ready to mill. Bendy did not seem at all concerned, but grinned cheerfully, and so contagious was the grin that it spread across Ben Caunt's expansive features and round the ring. The Birmingham brigade offered 2 to 1 against Bendigo, and found ready takers amongst the Nottingham Fancy, Joe Whitaker being foremost. Mr. Jephson also laid his money out lavishly, and put a number of small sums on Bendigo that had been entrusted to him by supporters at the Lion and Unicorn.

Bendigo seemed inclined to let drive at the big 'un's ribs and worked round him shiftily. But Ben Caunt suddenly turned aggressive. He dashed at Bendy and swung in a terrific blow at the head. Bendigo ducked under the long arm, and as it swept over his head sprang in. There was a squelch in Caunt's face; the smash of a blow that jolted his head back. It stopped him as if he had been pole-axed. Bendy stepped back nimbly.

Caunt looked stupefied. He rubbed his nose, and watching things closely and curiously through his quizzing-glass, the Duke of Limbs perceived a purple percolation.

"Egad! Bendy's tapped his claret. It's first blood to our man," he cried.

There came a gush at Caunt's nostrils.

"First blood to Bendigo!" the Nottingham Fancy stormed. Caunt shook his head like a bear, and bore down on his wily adversary again. His tactics were identically the same. But he hooked the left at Bendy this time, Bendigo ducked down, saw a long shadow pass on the turf against his feet, slipped in, and again dashed his fist with an upward lift in the Hucknall man's face.

Caunt was sent staggering, but he kept his feet, and made a rush at Bendigo. Wrestling was half the battle in those days, and Ben wanted to pin Bendigo against the stakes where he could not escape, and throw him. But the ropes gave with a creak and slipping round Bendy landed a rib-bender. Ben Butler kept challenging "fouls" but none of his chickens would roost, and he was only laughed at for his pains. Bendy's serving of caper sauce was highly relished by his supporters and the knowing ones. A coachman at the back of the ring cracked his whip and chirruped:

"Blow me dickey! He's a-giving him pepper."

Crack! Crack! Crack! Big Ben napped it every time he swung wide, and he carried far too much tallow. A mouse had crept under each eye and Bendigo's waspish blows stung him into lumps whilst the young man with the blue birdseye seemed as hard as a devilled bone.

"Egad! where's your horse to a hen now?" the Duke asked Harry Potter. It looks to me like Lombard Street to a china orange on our man."

"Your hen's a game chicken, Duke," Potter admitted, "but the big 'un may give him a burster yet."

"The gameness is all on Caunt's side," said a London sportsman who was dressed in the height of the metropolitan fashion and something of a coxcomb at that. "The other fellow is made up of tricks from heel to headpiece."

The Duke bristled, and but for the press around him might have used his stick.

"And who the devil are you, sir?" he cried, his cheekbones flushed with wrath. "The hen is giving the horse three good stone and nearly five inches. His tactics may not appeal to you, but Bendigo is fighting Ben Caunt in his own way, and it is the only way a man of his size can hope to win. I repeat, sir, who the devil *are* you?"

The coxcomb was rather staggered by this outburst, but he answered pompously:

"The representative of *Bell's Life*, sir."

"Oh, come now, Whitaker," Harry Potter intervened. "This gentleman is quite within his rights in criticizing the fight since he is a foremost scribe of the London sporting prints. I'm sorry I overlooked introducing him to you."

The Duke was not mollified, but in Bendigo's interests he allowed Potter and Ridsdale between them to smooth him down, and the thud of blows drew their

attention away from this personal matter to the men within the ropes.

Bendy's adeptness was winning hosts of admirers. The Nottingham "Lambs" made themselves heard from the first, and many of the Birmingham contingent soon fell away from grace and joined in their bleating. Bendy's terrific hitting amazed every one. It was equalled only by Ben Caunt's gameness. He had no chance against Bendy as a boxer. He was awkward and slow, whilst Bendy nipped in and out, nailing him with his hard knuckles, ducking and dodging, and when he chanced to be knocked down, turning a somersault in at the bargain.

Two or three times he hit Ben Caunt clean off his feet, at which his backers roared round the ring. Then when Caunt seemed to be crushing him in a wrestling grip, he slipped artfully out of it to the turf, amidst clamors of "Foul" from the Hucknall man's supporters. Flesh and blood could not go on for ever. Ben Caunt took punishment enough to stop half a dozen men. At the end of the 22d round he could stand it no longer, and following Bendigo into his corner, he cried, "Wilt thou stan' up an' feight fair, thou domned hound!" Bendy was on Sam Turner's knee. Blazing with passion, Ben Caunt dealt him a swinging blow, knocking both him and his second over on the turf. There was a roar from the crowd, a rush to the ropes.

"That's the best blow he's gen me in the fight, and the one that'll lose it him," Bendy laughed, springing to his feet and helping Sam Turner up.

Men hung on to the ropes and raged at Caunt, who stood sheepishly between his seconds and his backers. There could only be one decision. The referee an-

nounced that Ben Caunt had lost the fight on a foul, and awarded the victory and stake money to Bendigo.

Sam Turner fetched the colors down and handed them to Bendy, who stood with the birdseye and orange handkerchiefs in his hand, receiving the congratulations of his supporters at the ropes. As victor he was entitled to carry off Ben Caunt's color for a trophy. Harry Potter gave his white beaver a new tilt and paid out without a murmur.

The excitement flickered out with the betting money, as one by one the conveyances set off, and as Ridsdale mounted his yellow-painted curricie, Harry Potter approached the Duke of Limbs to give him a parting handshake. He must have lost a lot of money in bets, but his enormous white beaver hat had lost nothing in rakishness. It was still stuck at a jaunty angle.

"I'd like to be at the ringside when your man fights again," he said.

"I'll see that you get due notice of the event," Whitaker promised

"What's his name? Bendigo? A dashed odd name, but I shouldn't wonder if we hear a good deal more of it."

Potter stuck a thumb in his brocaded waistcoat, swung the seals at his fob, looked round to see that Ridsdale was nowhere near, and added—"My money will be on Bendigo next time. He will bite the ear of the Deaf 'Un before he's much older."

The Nottingham Fancy gave Harry Potter and Jack Ridsdale a cheer as they drove off. They gave Ben Caunt an ironical one, but Ben Butler flicked up his horse and took no notice of it. Outside the Coach and Six at Hucknall a little crowd of frame-work knitters and village folk waited to hear news of the battle from Appleby. Ben Butler himself was

the first to bring it, and as he drove up to his sign he proclaimed:

"The Nottingham man won on a foul. He wouldn't stan' up to Ben. There was a lot of outcry agen him, and Ben lost his temper. They gen Bendigo the fight because Ben went at him and floored him in his corner. He never stood up to Ben all through the fight."

"Somebody's stood up to him by the looks on his face," a stout woman who stood by the roadside said in a high-pitched voice. "Who milled him if it warn't Bendigo?"

She wore a blue belcher handkerchief tied round her head to keep off the heat of the sun, and her bold black eyes were staring like beads at Ben Caunt's distorted features.

"How many rounds did they feight?" she asked.

"Twenty-two," Harry Bamford answered.

"An' Bendigo wouldn't stan' up to him! It's a lie! He's been milled, and Bendy's milled him. Take him home and put him to bed, the great big booby."

Ben Butler forgot himself sufficiently to slash at the woman on the roadside, but Harry Bamford seized the whip, and fortunately there was no harm done.

"Don't be a fool," Bamford said. "It's no good losing your temper. That's Bendy's mother."

The crowd stared at the woman in curiosity.

"It's Bendigo's mother," went round. She tore her son's fighting colors from her graying head and waved them in the air. "Bendy for ever!" she cried. "Hurrah for the bonny blue birdseye!"

The crowd, consisting of Hucknall folk who had gathered at the Coach and Six to cheer Ben Caunt on his victorious return, were unresponsive, but a few young fellows from adjoining villages cheered for Bendigo, and Bendigo's mother was a host in herself.

Waving the blue handkerchief in triumph, she started to walk back to Nottingham along the hot and dusty Hucknall road. Singing snatches of old ballads of the prize ring as she went, she stopped at times amongst the gorse and lingered to wave the bonny blue birdseye over her head.

CHAPTER VIII

A FLUTTER AMONG THE FANCY

WHEN the Nottingham Fancy arrived back at the Lion and Unicorn in traps and gigs with a post-horn facetiously known as "a yard of tin," blowing as if the mail-coach was coming in, they had a great reception. The Duke of Limbs flourished Bendigo's blue birdseye, whilst Mr. Jephson, the landlord, waved Ben Caunt's forfeited fighting colors.

"I got two to one at the ringside off Harry Potter, the Birmingham bookie," he announced, "so some of you have a decent bit of money to draw, and I shall pay out in the taproom. The Duke will now say a word or two."

But Joe Whitaker was more in the mood for laying the dust of the road by a tankard of home-brewed ale. "All I've got to say is that Bendy thanks his supporters one and all, and hopes he has merited the continuance of their support in his next fight. It won't be long before we put him in the ring again, and against a better man than Ben Caunt, if we can find one."

Bendigo bobbed his head and the crowd roared as the Duke waved his fighting color in the air above his short-cropped "nob" and grinning countenance. Volleys of cheers echoed from the courts and side streets, where spectators lined every available wall.

Slipping out of the back way of the Lion and Unicorn, Bendy ran home with the news.

"Mother, I've beat Ben Caunt, and here's my share of the battle money," he said, showering a handful of gold on the table.

"You don't look much worse for it neither," Mrs. Thompson said, scrutinizing her son's face.

"You ought to see the other chap's mug."

"I've heard about it."

"Who told you?"

"A woman who went to Hucknall to get to know how you'd gone on, Bendy."

"There's on'y one woman as 'ud do that, mother."

"If I caught any other woman doing it, I'd mill her, or she should mill me," Bendigo's mother declared fiercely. "I seed Ben Caunt's face, and it was the prettiest sight I ever saw on a fine summer's day, like buttercups and daisies to me. If Ben Caunt says you didn't stan' up to him you've made him look a liar, as anybody wi' a pair of eyes in their head can see for themselves."

At the Lion and Unicorn the fighting "fogles" decked the Duke's chair. The blazon of the fighting colors and the Duke's yard of clay conferred dignity on the chair, and kept the company at a respectful distance, although for that matter, Joe Whitaker's bodily bulk alone filled his corner. The fight at Appleby was discussed round by round.

"The big gamekeeper's game enough, but he couldn't have beat me in a blue moon," Bendy chuckled. "I kept him dancing about like a big bear. I'd about worn him down to my weight, and I was just beginning to mill him, when he gave me the fight. If he was as quick wi' his fist as he was wi' his temper, he'd be a match for Bill Atkinson any day."

The dandy little tailor spat out an oath, and wanted to take his well-fitting coat off to Bendy in the room.

"If you'll come into the backyard I'll soon show you how Ben Caunt ought to have fought you," he said.

But Bendy shook his head.

"Go and show Sam Merriman. I'm too artful already. But Sam's willing to learn anything you can teach him."

Although they were such good friends, Merriman felt it incumbent upon him to stand up and announce that he was willing to have a cut at his old sartorial rival there and then.

"Chuck a mug at his head, Duke," Bendy grinned. "They both on 'em ought to know better at their time of life."

The Duke of Limbs brought his ponderous personality to bear on the argumentative gentlemen of the Fancy.

"Egad! gentlemen, order for the chair," he cried, hammering on the table with a tankard. "I can scarcely hear myself speak."

His voice made the windows rattle all round the room, and, as if fascinated, they watched his big hand absolutely crush the pewter pot up to a metal pulp.

This extraordinary feat of strength, which, out of regard for the landlord's stock in trade, he did not often perform, had the effect of restoring order in the room.

"I shall now call on Fettle Porter for a song which he has fettle up special for the occasion," the inn-keeper said. Old Jerry had followed the flight of the Fancy in Mr. Jephson's trap, and was sitting beside a mug of his favorite beverage, blowing a cloud from a churchwarden pipe. A box of these long, clay pipes stood open in the room for anyone to help himself. They were conducive to comfort and civility in conversation, for the old-fashioned churchwarden pipe was the green seal of good fellowship and what man with a consoling yard of clay in front of him would engage in a quarrel with his neighbor? For if he broke the peace he inevitably broke his pipe, and we have seen

how a broken pipe disturbed the equanimity even of the philosophical Jem Burn.

The Duke hammered on the table for order, and being already on his feet old Jerry said:

"I've fettled this song up as I did the Prince Regent's porter wi' a grate o' nutmeg and a clove or two. It's the old song that celebrated Tom Cribb's victory over Tom Molyneux, the blackamoor, at Thistle-ton Gap, a battle which I saw fowt wi' these werry eyes, being a young covey at the time. It's the identical chaunt as is sung at every milling crib in London, so none of your gents will have any difficulty in picking it up an' joining in the coal-box. But I should like to have a fiddle to it."

"You're a-goin' to have a fiddle, Jerry," said Mr. Jephson, "and the company will all join in free and hearty."

The fiddler tuned up, and after another swig at his porter, Jerry undid the pewter buttons of his red coat and commenced the following chaunt:

"Oh! have you not heard of our jolly young Bendigo,

Who over to Appleby went for to ply.

His mawlies he used with such skill and dexterity

Winning the mill, sir, and blacking Ben's eye.

He sparred so neat and he fought so steadily,

He hit so straight, and he won so readily,

That now he's amongst us give him a cheer.

Though he dodged and he ducked, yet his fighting was fair.

"To mention the times he has won by hard milling,

'Tis needless to tell unto anyone here;

For though he's no dandy, he's very nigh killing,

And his arguments have an effect on the ear.

He hit out so often, and he fought so steadily,

He milled away, and he won so readily

That now he's amongst us give him a cheer.

Though he ducked and he dodged, still his fighting was fair."

The Duke of Limbs tried to harmonize by putting in a deep bass to Jerry's cracked piping, and the

squeaking of the fiddle, but he suddenly became aware that some bolder voice than his own was doing much to cobble up the discords and put varnish if not lustre on the indifferent fiddle.

"Egad," he muttered, "that's Bendigo's mother!"

Up went his quizzing-glass and through the tobacco smoke he saw her standing outside the window, which she had pushed wide open so that she could see well into the room.

At the end of the second verse, prompted by the Duke, the Nottingham Fancy rose to its feet as one man, and lifting the first mug or pewter pot it could lay hands on, drank "free and hearty" to the buxom, comely woman, who was fluttering the blue birdseye in at the window.

When the next issue of *Bell's Life* reached the Lion and Unicorn the Duke, who acted as newspaper reader to the Fancy, unfolded it and bristled until his enormous whiskers stood out as if they had been brushed the wrong way.

"That London puppy has said his say in print, wi' a fourpenny newspaper stamp on the face of it," he growled. "Listen to this."

To a room full of the Fancy, blowing a cloud, he read out a one-sided account of the fight, which discredited Bendigo, and concluded caustically:

"It was the expressed opinion of the spectators that had Caunt kept his temper, and husbanded his strength, the issue would have gone the other way, as he proved himself game to the backbone, while his opponent was made up of dodges from heel to headpiece."

The assembled Fancy showed its disapproval by booing *Bell's Life*. The Duke threw the sporting newspaper down, and flashed his quizzing-glass round the room.

"Damn the puppy's impertinence," he snapped. "I wished I'd laid my cane about him at the ringside."

His choleric outburst was mollified by Mr. Jephson's handing him a bundle of letters. "They've all come by mail the last few days, Duke," he said.

They were mostly challenges from Midland pugilists and their backers, who had heard of Bendigo's victory over Ben Caunt, and wanted to meet him in the ring for a small stake. There was also an invitation to join a Sheffield boxing booth to travel about giving sparring exhibitions, and much to the Duke's surprise, Bendigo's inclination ran more towards the travelling show than anything else.

"I should be boxing all the time, Duke, if I travelled with the booth," Bendy said, "taking on all comers."

"Begad, so you would, and it would be just the thing for you. Levi Eckersley, who has sent the invitation, is a good man himself, and you'd meet some good men on the road. Deaf Burke is trying to raise enough money to fight Jem Ward by touring the country with a boxing show. Old Jem won't give the belt up without another battle for it. He vowed at first he wouldn't go into the ring for less than £500 a side. He's dropped his price to £300 against Burke's £200, and the Deaf 'Un's after the money. It's not his first tour with a company of boxers. Two years ago he travelled up in the north with Jack Carter's London troupe of boxers."

Sam Turner, Bill Atkinson, and Sam Merriman, although stay-at-homes themselves, thought it would be a good thing for a single young fellow like Bendy to see life and gain experience with a travelling boxing booth. That was also the opinion of Mr. Jephson, so the Duke wrote a letter to Levi Eckersley, at Sheffield,

accepting the offer, and telling him to expect Bendigo by an early coach.

Mrs. Thompson contemplated the temporary loss of her son stoically, after a talk with the Duke of Limbs.

"All the champions, from Figg to Jem Ward, have fought in travelling shows at one time or another," she said. "You'll mill your way to London, lad, afore you're much older. As for the money you brought with you from Appleby, although gowden sovereigns have a warm, comfortin' shine, I've on'y broke into one of 'em yet. Not that I'm a stingy body wi' money. I care nowt for it, and I'd never have you grow fond of it."

"I'm fonder o' you, mother, than I ever shall be of money, or owt else in the world," Bendy said.

"Ay, lad, until she comes who is prettier than the blue birdseye and prouder than a mother's pride. I'll ha' to gie you up to some lily-white wench one day or the other. All I ask is before that day comes you'll bring the birdseye back to us as London pride and the cock o' the Fancy."

If she had said a brown wench Bendigo might have flushed uneasily, but with Cherry Ribbons in his mind he laughed at lily-white wenches. He knew nothing of women—except his mother, and she was the other half of his life. But although they were both dark and comely, he dared not think of his mother's defiant eyes and Zillah's teasing glance together. Their faces would scowl at each other across his thoughts. He could see his mother's fists raised to mar the gypsy's beauty. He dared not associate them in his mind, and to tell his mother about Cherry Ribbons would be madness. Yet this was the only thing Bendigo had ever kept secret from her, and it haunted him.

His friends and supporters saw Bendigo off by

mail-coach, which journeyed by way of Mansfield and Chesterfield to Sheffield, where he was to join the boxing show. His luggage consisted of a change of clothing, a set of boxing gloves, and a purse presented to him by his admirers.

His mother ran some distance after the coach until she could go no farther for lack of breath. But she stood in the road and waved Bendigo's old blue birds-eye until the coach was out of sight. Then the Duke on his big bay horse, overtook the coach and rode a mile or two with it on the strip of sandy grass beside the highway, finally standing up in the stirrups and waving his riding crop above his head. The guard blew his coach-horn and as the Duke of Limbs faded away in the distance, the young man with the blue birdseye turned his face to the open road.

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CHAPTER IX

THE FIDDLER WHO PLAYED THE WRONG TUNE

THE guard of the coach directed Bendigo to the boxing booth, which was pitched on the roadside just outside Sheffield. On the painted canvas front was a new "flash" announcing that Bendigo, of Nottingham, had been engaged to appear with Levi Eckersley's company of boxers. From inside the tent came the muffled thud of boxing gloves which sounded as if some of the company were having a set-to. A tall man in his shirt sleeves shouted "Hullo!" He was making his way circumspectly from the Red Lion Inn nearly opposite, walking cautiously and without any undue haste, holding out a jug of ale, which by the froth on the top of it appeared to be in excellent condition.

He was a swarthy-skinned man with curly black hair.

"Are you Bendigo?" he asked as he drew near.

"Yes, I'm the chap who fought Ben Caunt," Bendy grinned.

"Glad you've turned up. I'm Levi Eckersley."

"Good health," Bendy said, taking the jug of beer from him and swigging at it.

"Well, that's demned cool," Eckersley ejaculated. "You've taken the lining out of a quart o' the best."

"Aren't you going to drink the rest?" Bendigo asked wiping his mouth.

"No. I've had a mug at the Red Lion. Boshers pays for this jugful. He's in there having a round or two wi' Sam Pixton." The flap of the tent was

thrown up and two men in "sweaters" stepped out of it. "Peter Taylor and Gypsy," Eckersley said, standing with the ale jug in his hand. "Gypsy" needed no further introduction, for Bendigo saw at a glance he was none other than Cherry Ribbon's brother, Jasper, the tinker.

"Got the beer, Levi?" Peter Taylor asked.

"What's left of it, but the young covey's had a good swig at it."

"There'll be a barney then. Boshers in a wicked temper."

"This is the covey from Nottingham who beat Ben Caunt," Eckersley was saying, when an interruption occurred. A thick-set head with a broken nose bulged through the flap of the tent. It belonged to Boshers.

"Where the Monday morning's the blessed booze?" he scowled.

"Some of it's in the jug. This young fellow has drunk the rest, but I'll get it filled up again."

"What the Tuesday afternoon did you let him drink my beer for?"

"He helped himself to it. No harm done. The covey's come a long journey."

"Who the Saturday night is he?"

"Bendigo, from Nottingham."

"And who the blazes is Bendigo?"

"Well, now, that's demned cool," laughed Eckersley, "and we've got his monicker flashed all over the show."

The young man wearing the blue birdseye must have now become blushing aware that he had not approached the boxing booth with the proper respect and deference due from a novice to an academy of his art. But he offered no apology beyond a good-humored grin. The broken-nosed man emerged bodily from the

booth, tore off the dirty boxing gloves attached to his hands, and reached for the jug. He had a mottled and corrugated countenance, bit into by many knuckles, possibly in a commendable endeavor to knock it into a better shape than the one in which nature had moulded it. They had not, however, succeeded in softening or refining the brutal expression habitual to it. Attached to the man's unprepossessing features were a pair of ears as cauliflowery as could be laid on with the gloves, and a neck so thick that if by any not unlikely mischance it had come into the hands of the public hangman, he would have been puzzled how to stretch it to the full extent of the law, except by Jack Ketch's obsolete method of hanging on to the subjoined legs. The thick-set man emptied what little beer was left down his capacious throat. That he considered the quantity to be insufficient he plainly showed by throwing the jug at Bendigo, who caught it dexterously and handed it to Eckersley.

"Dressed up like Sunday morning and can't pay for his own booze," brooded Boshier. "Thinks he can bite his name on anybody's mug and guzzle off another man's beer behind his back."

"I'll pay for the beer if he takes it in that way," Bendigo said, nettled, but civil enough.

"Do you know it wouldn't take me long to give you a thundering good hiding," said the man with the broken nose. "Come inside the booth and I'll do it now."

"Don't be a fool," Eckersley said hastily, anxious not to have Bendigo's beauty spoilt for the opening show.

"What the L-e-v-i have you got to do with it? He's drunk my beer, that's the main point of the argument, and he's wearing my colors. I'm not going to

play second fiddle to any man that likes to sport a blarsted blue birdseye round his squeeze."

"That's done it," Eckersley muttered, for Bendigo was out of his coat in a twinkling.

"Come over here," he said throwing it on the grass.

The man with the broken nose obliged. He stepped up briskly and looked game enough for anything.

"Did he pay for the beer, Mr. Eckersley?" Bendigo asked, wary of his opponent all the time.

"No, he didn't. It's on strap."

"Then I'll pay for it. I don't want him to think I've had a drink at his expense, because I'm going to mill him."

What might have happened to Bendigo between the narrow ropes inside the boxing booth there is no saying. But he had Boshier out on the grass and he did pretty much as he liked with him. For the ear-marked and knuckle-scarred bruiser was slow and slogging whilst Bendy had been brought up among the good little men with quick hands. He fought a fast and punishing fight and finally sent the broken-nosed bruiser to grass with the senses battered out of him and the memories of his old battles unstitched up and down his face.

"Fetch a bucket of water and sluice it over him," Eckersley said. "Boshier's been asking for what he's got a long time now. I'll pay him off when he comes round. One of these fine days I should have had to mill him myself if Bendigo hadn't taken the job out of my hands."

In his heart Eckersley knew that he could not have done it so well or easily. He thought Boshier to be a better man with his hands than he showed up. And so he might have proved inside the boxing booth. But Bendigo was on clover when he could get his feet on a sweet bit of grass, as the Duke of Limbs phrased it. A

little later, with a pair of old boxing gloves, a fiddle in a green bag, and a few shillings in his pocket, the broken-nosed man slunk down the high road that led away from Sheffield, unwept, unhonored, and unsung.

"The main thing about Boshier was he could fake the bosh," Eckersley said, handing a fiddle to Jasper. "There'll only be one catgut teaser now in the show, so you'd better rosin up, my lad."

"What does he mean by fake the bosh?" Bendigo inquired.

"It's flash patter for playing the fiddle. Boshier got his name from faking the bosh on the show front like I do. You'll get used to the way Eckersley talks. I knew there'd be a blaze-up over the booze. You did a good thing to mill Boshier outside the booth. He knows every trick and move inside the short ropes. Fate seems to bring us together like thrown stones, Blue Birdseye, or like a fiddle and an old tune."

While he was talking Jasper kept on tuning the fiddle, holding it now to his ear and now upon his knee all the time, not looking up or away from it so that he appeared to be addressing what he said to the fiddle more than to Bendigo.

"As I could not settle down to the wayside fire I took the Tinman's fiddle out one night and set off wandering. I fiddled myself out of the night into the morning, and off the byroad into the highroad, and so away from my own people and here to Sheffield, where I joined Levi Eckersley's booth to fiddle and box. I won a good bit of money when you beat Ben Caunt at Appleby, and so did Eckersley, thanks to the tip I gave him. That's what made him send for you. I'd sooner tinker with a fiddlestick than a soldering iron, but I'm not much good at either."

The inlay of mother-of-pearl on the fiddlestick

glimmered as Jasper picked it up; for the first time his gypsy eyes flashed full at Bendigo out of his sallow countenance. "Listen to the old tune of 'Smiling Polly' as we call it on the Tyne."

Now what he called "Smiling Polly" was nothing else but the old tune of the "Keel Row."

As I came thro' Sandgate, thro' Sandgate, thro' Sandgate,
As I came thro' Sandgate, I heard a lassie sing—
Oh, weel may the keel row, the keel row, the keel row,
Oh, weel may the keel row that my laddie's in.

Never before had Bendigo heard such playing, for the fiddle was singing to him of Cherry Ribbons all the time.

"There's a crowdsman for you!" Eckersley said, coming up to them. Did you ever hear a fiddle faked finer? Scrape it like that on the show front, and you'll bring 'em all along jig-a-leg. Let's go over to the Red Lion. I'll stand Sammy."

"Not for me," Bendy said. "I'll pay my own footing."

Eckersley took him aside.

"Can you show the needful, tip the brads, sport the rhino, or flash the blunt? In other words, have you plenty of money to go on with, or do you want to borrow a bit out of your thirty bob a week and all found?"

"Two pounds a week, and all found," Bendy countered. "The Duke said I wasn't to take any less."

Eckersley shook his head, produced a snuff-box and took a pinch with a flourish.

"Too much. Can't pay it. Good pay and good grub. Not to be sneezed at."

As Eckersley knocked the spilt snuff off his sleeve, Bendigo was overtaken by a paroxysm of sneezing which could not be suppressed.

"Snuff serve you like that? Demned funny. No effect at all on me. Never had."

"It's not the snuff, Mr. Eckersley. It's the thirty bob. The Duke put the window up like this," mimicking Joe Whitaker's quizzing-glass. "'Don't take a penny less than two pounds a week, my lad,' says he. 'See 'em damned first,' says the Duke. So you'd better pay my coach fare back to Nottingham."

"The Duke, eh?" mused Eckersley, thinking some sprig of the nobility had taken Bendigo up already. "Well, I'll engage you at that to take on all comers, until Doncaster races. We get there for the Sellinger week, and then return to Sheffield." He meant the St. Leger, but aped the Corinthian pronunciation.

A settlement having been arrived at, Levi Eckersley's company of boxers went over the way to the Red Lion, stepping along to the brisk lilt of Gypsy's fiddle. Bendigo stood his footing in nut-brown ale, Eckersley ordered "a burster and beeswax" for each of them, by which he meant bread and cheese, and the landlord throwing in radishes and onions, they made a homely country meal as well as each other's better acquaintance.

CHAPTER X

THE GREEN HIGHWAY

IT WAS indeed what the Duke called a sweet life for a young man. They lived and slept in the open, and travelled up and down winding lanes and along broad ways by which the Romans came and went. But other Romans were left behind, dark-skinned children of the road, God's vagrants that the wind and the rain and the sun had mellowed so to the English countryside that they seemed a clinging part of it, like the furze and the heather. A sweet life for a young man and a growing life. Bendigo sometimes wondered if his mother would know him, so sunburned and gypsyish and well-knit had he become; and yet there was not a spare ounce upon his body, and it danced with the joy of life, and went singing along like Jasper's fiddle.

They spent burning days on the road under a blue sky, mostly walking by the roadside grass, although now and again one or other of them would ask for a lift in the caravan which carried the packed-up booth. And at night in his season Sir Oliver came out.

The identity of Levi Eckersley's Corinthian friend puzzled Bendigo when he first heard his name.

"Here's Sir Oliver," said Eckersley as they turned the horse out one night on a common, and darkness crept on.

"Where?" he asked, staring down the lane-end opposite.

"Why, you're not such a fly covey as I thought you were, my lad," laughed Eckersley, pointing with his

pipe to the moon. "There's Sir Oliver with his silver candlestick come to light us all to bed."

"It's a flash name for the moon," Jasper said, taking up his fiddle and giving them "Smiling Polly," which set Bendigo thinking again of Cherry Ribbons as it did when he first heard it. If it went to his head it went to the other men's feet, and soon they were dancing on the moonlit common with only Sir Oliver looking on.

"I wonder how many Romanies have danced to this old fiddle under Sir Oliver," Jasper mused. "And will again, for who can keep a Romany fiddle long out of a Romany tent? It's the same with a moonstruck man or woman belonging to our people. Sir Oliver beckons him over the heath, and he goes. But the caravan calls and there's a tongue every clump of goss and every yard of heather though it stretch for a hundred miles, and the gypsy hears his own speech cheeping out of the heath like a singing bird in a bush, and man or woman comes back to the roadside fire. All a gypsy's good for is to fiddle and dance, bend osiers and mend kettles."

With Jasper's fiddling and philosophy still in his ears Bendigo threw himself down in the thick, warm grass and went to sleep under Sir Oliver.

They were in Norfolk now, a country renowned for fairs and prize fighters, having bred, among others, Jack Slack, the Norwich butcher, who beat Broughton and became the grandsire of the Belchers. After travelling about they pitched on Mousehole Heath—"Muzzle Heath," Jasper called it, pointing out to Bendigo the place where the Fighting Tinman had beaten Black Oakland. It was notorious for gypsies, and some from a neighboring encampment soon spied them out. "Levi Eckersley's World-Famous Troupe

of Boxers " one of them read out, at which they all laughed, squaring their brown fists and flashing their dark eyes.

" We will come and fight your best man in the booth," they said, " or on the heath with bare knuckles. Where is he? "

" He's here," said the tactful Eckersley, indicating Jasper, who jabbered to them in Romany. They almost screamed with excitement on finding that one of the Rye was the pet of the Fancy. There were brown faces all round the ropes next day when a sturdy young gypsy from Mousehole Heath took the ring against Jasper and gave him the fight of his life. But Jasper won and that pleased everybody. The men in velveteens and moleskin carried him on their shoulders, the women with flash jewellery and coats of many colors ran cheering across the heath. Then Jasper played them a rant on his fiddle and they footed it outside the booth. " Greasy money, but only two bad shillings among it," Eckersley said after counting it all over and biting most of it.

The booth travelled far afield to wakes and fairs and races and Bendigo scarcely knew what country they were in, nor cared, for that matter, since wherever they went were green fields with oak, ash, and elm, a loitering twilight and a deepening blue sky that night sprinkled with a birdseye of twinkling stars; and the rain might soak him but the wind and sun dried him, and he tingled the more with life for the wetting.

For one thing he never dreamed there were so many red waistcoats in England as he saw upon portly innkeepers; nor so many white-washed roadside inns, with bow windows to match the innkeepers' waistcoats; and in some villages so many horseshoes were displayed over doors that it looked as if some crazy

blacksmith had gone about all night nailing them up to keep the village from witchcraft. Then the villages through which they passed were so much alike that he could never tell one from another; the inn signboards were often the same, and he grew accustomed to look for the blacksmith's shop, the wheelwright's, the saddle and harness maker's, the miller's, the baker's, the straggling farmhouses, and the general dealers in the main street, where strings of onions were hung up alongside tallow dips, and bacon was sliced with the same knife as Negro's Head plug tobacco.

So they passed from county to county:

By gorse commons and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows bordering unfrequented lanes.

And into the boxing booth came so many odd characters that if a procession of them were to go through the pages of this book, they would fill it from cover to cover. There were rat-catchers and mole-catchers, men in moleskins, shoeing-smiths, black from the forge, in leather aprons with their sleeves rolled up, stablemen and wheelwrights, and butchers and bakers, and carters and cobblers, and publicans and ploughmen and poachers, stockingers and sweeps and hedgers and ditchers, and carriers, and coachmen, and clodhoppers with clay on their boots, and millers' men sprinkled with flour, and grinders with shiny clothes, and factory hands with ravellings of cotton on their coats, and youths from the brickyard with smock frocks and gamekeepers in velveteens. And now and again an old gaffer with a rosy nutcracker face would point his knotty stick at the show front and tell the lads of the village how he had beaten the Clayfield-cum-Mud champion, when he was such a fine upstanding young fellow they painted him on the sign of the Plough Inn.

CHAPTER XI

HOW A GUINEA WENT BEGGING

"SOMETHING up at the Post Horn," said Levi Eckersley.

The booth was pitched on the coaching road to York at a comfortable distance from the Post Horn Inn where a man could step across and bring his beer home in Nature's earthenware.

"There's a coach changing horses and all the passengers are coming this way. Damme if it ain't Handsome Harry, that cock-eyed coachman, they've been bragging about. They've put him on the box on purpose to pay us a visit, and here he comes with one covey blowing the 'Tantivy Trot' and another cracking his whip."

The procession arrived to the blare of a long post-horn, a number of coaching men and sporting passengers escorting their hero and announcing to Eckersley that he had come for a turn-up whilst the coach was changing horses.

The pugilistic coachman had such a pronounced cast in one of his eyes that he had never been known at crossways to drive up the road he was looking at; and on the box, whilst he was intently gazing at the offside wheeler, his whip would slip under the bars of the near leader. But the stolid look on his face assured the puzzled passengers on the box-seat *that* was the horse he had intended to reach all the time. There was not a better whip on the Great North road, and he had used his hands so well on other coachmen that the fraternity fancied his chance against Levi Eckersley,

or any of his company, and told him so without mincing matters.

"What our man wants is a turn-up with one or the other of you," said the sportsman who carried the whip. "We'll back him against the booth at even money. He doesn't care which of you it is, but he's got to drive the Eclipse to York. The village saddler is mending a trace which obligingly broke in two whilst they were taking the horses out at the Post Horn. When that's done and fresh horses are in we shall have to start off. So get at it quick."

The coachman took off his caped coat and glazed hat, in the lining of which several letters were packed.

"In case of accident, money to be collected on delivery, George," he said to the guard.

The guard winked. "I'll see after 'em Harry—leave 'em to me."

"An' don't neglect to make a collection for the widow an' orphans, George."

"Whose widow and orphans?"

"Ah! now you're arskin', George," said the squint-eyed coachman giving a comical twist to the straw which had never left his mouth and ducking through the flap of the tent, which was held invitingly open by Bendigo.

"You take him on," Eckersley whispered as he passed in, "but play lightly. Don't spoil him for the road, or we shall have to walk our chinks out of the county."

The burly coachman was bow-legged, and when he put the gloves on and squared up, he occupied as much of the ring as his coach did of the road. As he hit out in the opposite direction to that in which he was looking, Bendigo dodged the wrong way and got a leathered ear in consequence. It was only a love

tap, but the kiss of the glove gave out such a hearty smack that it exhilarated the pugilistic coachman. Chewing at his straw he danced round Bendigo and invited him to come on again.

"Go it, Cock-eye!" yelled his enthusiastic supporters, and the long coach-horn reaching over Levi Eckersley's shoulder nearly deafened everybody.

The pugilistic coachman made a furious attack on Bendigo, who had some difficulty in stalling him off, as the post-horn was blown in his ear on one side of the ropes and on the other the heavy butt of a loaded whipstock tickled his ribs playfully. The squint-eyed coachman was in high feather and favor. He kept trotting about to the post-horn and popping 'em in with such pertinacity that Bendigo was tempted to set about him in earnest. But Eckersley threw out warnings by screwing his features into eloquent contortions, and an occasional stage whisper floated over the ropes advising caution, forbearance, tolerance, and other virtues praiseworthy enough in their proper place, but scarcely suited for a pugilistic encounter.

"Take a bit without giving it back, my lad," Eckersley advised. "The covey's got to drive the York coach with some of the county gentry on top of it."

The blare of a coach-horn from the inn announced that the standing coach was now ready for the road. The sportsman with the yard of tin pushed it through the flap of the booth and blared back a reply.

"That'll let 'em know we're coming," he said. "Finish him off, Harry. You've had it all your own way, so far."

"Knock him out of time and get it over," the coachman's admirers advised. "It's all a fake. None of 'em can knock a dent in a pound of butter."

At this open jeer, Levi Eckersley changed his tune.

"If that's their game give him pepper and damn the consequences," he told Bendigo.

Thereupon the young man wearing the blue birds-eye at his belt slipped into the bow-legged coachman with both hands, and ended the round by knocking him over the ropes, where he fell between the sportsman with the yard of tin and the man with the whip. He was hauled out of the booth by his crestfallen companions, a whip handle pushed down his neck to stiffen his back, prop his head up, and cork his claret. Levi Eckersley picked up the post-horn which the sporting gentleman had discarded. They saw the coach preparing to start from the flap of the booth.

"If he hadn't had to drive the coach, we might have had a bit of trouble with them," Eckersley commented.

"If he hadn't had to drive we shouldn't have had half the trouble with Cock-eye," Bendigo grinned. "It was keeping him fit for the box that bothered me."

"Anyhow I didn't make much out of it. We'll go and drink his health at the Post Horn with what I took."

They saw the coach rising up a hill as they entered the inn.

"I'll bet that cock-eyed coachman is telling 'em all he could have beat you in another round," Eckersley said at the door of the inn. And so he was, with a whipstock still down his neck to hold his head up and keep as much of the "Tantivy Trot" in him as would suffice to drive the coach to York.

They came to Doncaster two or three days afterwards, and encamped upon the Town Moōr, close to the race course. Levi Eckersley and the others went forward to find a suitable pitch. After taking the horse out of the shafts and putting it to graze, Jasper sat on the caravan steps playing the fiddle, whilst Bendy

was sprawled out in the warm grass. One after the other, Jasper played all the favorite jigs and songs of the north country, and his fiddling called from the heathery distance a brown-skinned gypsy girl who knew the old bosh as well as she did the old tunes.

"Blue Birdseye at Doncaster!" she cried as her bright eyes took in the scene, "and as brown as a man of the Rye. Then he must have taken to the road and met with Jasper."

Looking up quickly at the race course she saw figures approaching, and immediately vanished amidst the green bushes at the back of the caravan.

Now the fiddling drowned the drumming of hoofs which were already thickly padded by the moorland grass between the race-course rails. A couple of horsemen came along at a canter. One of them a jockey, or stable lad, entrusted with a thoroughbred out for a spin, the other a young and foppish officer of Hussars, astride a heavy gray horse—a fine figure of a man even in undress uniform.

"Who the deuce is playing the fiddle, Nat?" he drawled. "By Gad, this may be the caravan where that dark-skinned charmer hangs out."

He set his gray horse at the rails and leaped them, nearly riding over Bendigo.

"Here are the aerial musicians," he laughed. "I wondered where the devil the fiddling came from. Have you seen anything of a roaming lass with a pair of bright eyes?"

"If you're looking for a pair of black eyes, you are in the right neighborhood for them. This is Levi Eckersley's boxing booth," Bendigo said, sitting up in the thick of the warm grass.

"Of all the damned impertinence!" the cavalry officer exploded. "Why, I'll take either of you on

with the mufflers, or with the raw 'uns for that matter, and, look here, my man, I'll give you a guinea if you last out three rounds with me."

He dropped from the saddle with a jingle of spurs at the heel and the gleam of gold braid up six foot of him.

"A guinea's a guinea," Bendigo mused. "Hold his horse whilst I earn it."

"I'll see him in blazes first," Jasper growled. "I know him of old and his way with women. He's Captain Castleton, the buck of York Barracks, prowling about the moor after some Romany lass. I'll be civil to no man who brings rue upon the Rye."

Bendigo was a stranger to Castleton and his reputation, but he knew the jockey for Nat Flatman, a rising young rider who had ridden at Nottingham in Lord George Bentinck's colors.

"I shouldn't have 'em on with him, sir," Nat respectfully advised. "He's one of the milling coves."

"A lad of the Fancy, is he?" Castleton laughed. "Well, so am I, and he'll have to earn the guinea before he gets it."

Deciding that a guinea was too good to miss, Bendy fetched a set of boxing gloves out of the caravan, and throwing off his Hussar jacket the foppish cavalry officer squeezed his elegant hands into a greasy pair. Bendy played lightly for the sake of the guinea which was coming his way. Captain Castleton showed himself a heavy hitter with a vicious right, whose main object was to punish his man as much as he could. Bendy was scarcely touched, but at the end of five minutes' sparring it pleased the captain to think he had given him a good gruelling. Nat Flatman was chafing. "I shall have the trainer complaining, sir,"

he said. "I brought the filly out for a spin, not to stand about."

"Oh, dammit all, Nat. I could have polished him off in another five minutes," Castleton complained. "But if you're in such a hurry I'll ride back to the stables with you."

He threw down the boxing gloves and pitched a guinea in the grass.

"I'll come and have 'em on with you again when you get the booth up," he said, "but you'll have to show better form in the ring, or I shall be giving you a doing down in your own booth. Do you happen to know anything about a pretty gypsy named Zillah, the daughter of a travelling tinker? She was fortune telling on the heath yesterday, and I took a fancy to the dark-eyed charmer. I offered to cross her palm with gold instead of silver, but the little witch wouldn't take it."

The fiddle cursed and Jasper spat insolently on the grass, looking full at Buck Castleton. Anger and contempt burned in Bendigo's blood, but the flush on his face was dappled where the lips of Cherry Ribbons had touched it.

"Come over here, Nat," he called out to the little jockey. "There's a guinea going begging on the grass, and you might as well pick it up as anybody else. I wouldn't touch this cove's dirty money if it was a purse of a hundred pounds."

CHAPTER XII

THE BUCK OF YORK BARRACKS

THE buck of York Barracks swung round in a black fury. "What do you mean by that?" he blazed.

"I mean you may be a sporting Corinthian to your friends, but you're a cowardly hound to women."

The scathing words slashed Captain Castleton's face like a whiplash.

"I'll smash you up for that!" he stormed.

"If you try it on you won't show your face in public at Doncaster races," Bendy warned him.

"Better leave him alone, sir," Nat Flatman advised, but Castleton was now in a blazing fury. He started out to give Bendigo a milling with the "mawlies," and missing with a heavy right got a smash to the jaw which spread him over six feet of grass. He fought like a devil, and Bendigo hit him like a hammer. In his fury he literally bit the grass. He had been petted by the Fancy, and was no doubt a good boxer with the gloves. Like the buck he was he had plenty of pluck of a sort. He had been used to milling others mercilessly at the barracks and thought he could take a milling himself. He got it. For Bendy stood up to him as man to man, and taking what came his way without flinching nearly knocked the buck's face to pieces, and all the time Jasper danced round them to his own music like a drunken fiddler at a fair while Nat Flatman tried all he knew to keep the horses quiet. Bendy never had greater stomach for a punishing fight in his life. He gruelled his man with both hands. Captain Castleton held on in the somewhat forlorn hope

of eventually getting the whip hand and smashing Bendigo up as he had threatened. Grassed time after time, and punched pretty well out of recognition, he would not accept defeat until Levi Eckersley arrived on the scene.

"What's all this?" Eckersley growled.

"I've been having a bit of a turn-up with a gentleman from York Barracks," Bendy explained. "He offered me a guinea to mill him with the gloves, but I've done it with the raw 'uns for love."

"Done it damned well, too, while I faked the bosh," Jasper spat out.

"It's all right," Captain Castleton said, holding on to the rails. "I'm a bit groggy now, but I'll have another go at him. What's his name? Bendigo, of Nottingham, is it? That's all I want to know. He's written it on the tablets of my memory in red ink, and I'll bear him well in mind. Where's Nat?"

"I'm here, sir. I'll look after you."

"Oh, there you are, Nat. I knew you'd be somewhere about. I'm afraid that dashed pugilistic fellow has tapped my claret rather copiously. Anyone could tell I belonged to an old county family with a wine cellar of good quality. Next time I fight Mr. Bendigo, we'll have a bottleholder. If you'll help me into the saddle, Nat, I'll ride with you to the stables and have a sponge-down."

"You've queered the pitch for us at Doncaster, and milled all the gilt off the gingerbread," Eckersley grumbled, "as well as spoiled your chance at the outset, if you ask me anything. Captain Castleton is one of the tiptop highfliers and biggest swells out of London."

"He doesn't look it," Bendy grinned, as they watched the almost superhuman efforts of little Nat,

the jockey, to get his charge into the saddle. The buck of York Barracks was unquestionably "all in," and he sagged about as his gray horse cantered alongside Nat's racing mount, a chestnut filly, which he was to ride in the St. Leger.

Eckersley expressed himself as dubious about their show being patronized by the nobs and swells now Captain Castleton had been milled outside of it. "If ours was the only show here it wouldn't matter so much," he said, "but Deaf Burke is at Doncaster for the race week, and has captured the best pitch on the course close to the grandstand, where the nobility and gentry will be sure to patronize him, and his company of London boxers, as he boldly announces that any money that he makes out of the tour will go towards backing him against Jem Ward for the championship."

Jasper had stood morose and silent all this time, but his gypsy eyes suddenly blazed up. "That swine is lucky to escape with what he took away," he said, shaking his clinched hand at the dwindling figure of the buck of York Barracks. "If Bendigo here hadn't milled him I might have killed him. There was a good temptation to a Romany."

With a bright flicker he threw a knife away from him. It flew from his hand to the heather and gleamed furtively against the pale gold of Buck Castleton's guinea.

"There's a guinea against your boot," Bendigo said. "It'll make up for as much as you're likely to lose by him not patronizing the booth. As for Deaf Burke there'll be more people at Doncaster races than will fill his show."

"You'll have to tease the catgut for all you're worth," Eckersley said to Jasper after the derelict guinea had somewhat mollified him. "I've been think-

ing we'd better dress up on the show front, as the Deaf 'Un is likely to be such a counter-attraction. I've got a decent pitch, and as soon as they've put the horse in we'll set off for it and get the booth up."

The other members of the show who had been drinking at one of the inns joined them, and their van set off across the heather to its allotted pitch. After the booth had been erected, Levi Eckersley turned out the contents of an old chest, which he used as a wardrobe. It contained some musty bundles which mystified Bendigo, but Eckersley set to work mending old clothes up and cleaning pewter buttons with an energy which did him credit when the time came to display the treasures he had rescued from moth and rust. A negro, who said he could box a bit, came up to the caravan, and asked if they could find him a job. Levi Eckersley engaged the man for a few shillings as a "chopping-block."

"The blackamoor will bring us luck," he said, his spirits rising. "He'll do for Molyneux as well as to chop at. Even with Deaf Burke pitching here we ought to do a fair share of business, although the London Fancy and the swells are sure to patronize him."

"There's not one man in fifty can hit me on the nob," Bendy said. "Why not challenge the swells to do it from the show front? Challenge Deaf Burke himself if you like. That'll fill the booth, and I'm not afraid of him."

Levi Eckersley looked amazed.

"Why, he'd knock you through the tent, lad. He killed Simon Byrne in his last fight, and was tried for manslaughter at Hertford assizes."

"I'll chance it," Bendigo grinned.

"You take my advice, young covey, and keep as far off the Deaf 'Un as you can. He's a terror, and the

champion of England any minute. I don't think myself that Jem Ward will ever face him in the ring. Jem gave up the belt when he took the Belt Tavern at Liverpool, in my way of thinking. But, barring the Deaf 'Un, it might be a draw if I offered the guinea that came easy, and threw out a challenge as you suggest."

They dressed up in the renovated clothes from the old wardrobe for their first appearance on the show front at Doncaster, Eckersley, wearing a white beaver hat together with knee breeches, buckled shoes, and an old-fashioned coat of faded cloth with pewter buttons, which reminded Bendigo of old Jerry at the fair, posed as the dandified "Gentleman" Jackson—still an arbiter of the prize ring—whilst Bendigo was attired to resemble Tom Cribb, and Jasper impersonated Dan Mendoza, the fighting Jew. Introduced from the show front as Molyneux, the Terrible Black, Sambo, the newly acquired nigger, grinned expansively and showed as many of his molars as he could muster.

On the morning of the St. Leger, Bendigo went over to Deaf Burke's show when the boxers were on the front, and in this way he caught his first glimpse of the Deaf 'Un. He looked a tough customer to tackle. He had a freckled Irish face with a bulldog jaw, and used a curious jargon of his own in talking.

"Gentlemens," he said from the show front, "I shall be pleased to fights any Jem Wards or anybody elses for the championships. If the Black Diamonds wants to fights he can haves the stakes when he likes. You know my records. I am Jem Burke, the Deaf 'Uns. Come insides and see me puts the gloves on with anybodies as likes. The admissions is only two shillings and one shillings and the boxing is abouts to commence."

At that moment one of the boxers touched Deaf

Burke on the shoulder, and pointing to Bendigo said something in his ear. Burke's gaze picked Bendigo out and with a grim smile on his freckled countenance he held a pair of boxing gloves up inquiring, "Would the young mans over theres likes to have them ons with me?"

Bendigo was stepping forward to oblige when someone caught at his arm and held him back. He turned and found Cherry Ribbons clinging to his arm.

CHAPTER XIII

"LET THE HEATHER GROW BETWEEN US"

ZILLAH's gypsy eyes flashed a warning, and still clinging to his arm she whispered, "You must not go in there, Blue Birdseye."

"Why not, Cherry Ribbons? I'll show the 'Deaf 'Un' I'm not afraid of him."

"Show him that in the prize ring when your time comes, not in a Doncaster boxing booth full of racing riff-raff. You may get a stick on your head, or a knife in your back."

Again Deaf Burke held up the "mufflers," which were laced together, and with a sardonic grin on his freckled face threw them at Bendigo. But quick as lightning Zillah caught the flying gloves, her lithe figure springing on tiptoe, and with a sweep of her shapely brown arm she pitched them back on the show front.

"Wasn't the milling of 'The Emerald Gem,' enough for you without you wanting to mill this young man?" she called out in tones of bitter scorn. Deaf as he was, Jem Burke heard what she shrilled at him in the Romany and understood the meaning of it. He had travelled with Jack Carter through the country fairs, and lived with gypsies on heath and common. There was nothing cooled his fighting courage so soon as being reminded that he had killed Simon Byrne in the ring, although such an accusation was not strictly true, for Byrne, the Emerald Gem, did not die till two days after their fight at St. Albans, and as fully exonerated his opponent as the coroner's inquest did. The real blame rested with the men's backers who, to decide

their bets, carried the fight beyond human endurance the men being three hours and a quarter in the ring.

The Deaf 'Uns bulldog jaw dropped. "I only asked him to spars a rounds or twos with the gloves, my dears," he said apologetically.

"Come over to Levi Eckersley's show, Deaf 'Un, and I'll oblige you," Bendigo offered.

Burke laughed, and addressed the crowd in his strange jargon, which was an odd mixture of the vernacular as spoken at Wapping Old Stairs, and in Houndstitch old clothes shops, sounding, as a jocular member of the London Fancy once said, as if the Deaf 'Un had partaken of too much "blue ruin" and saw two of everything.

"Listens to him, gentlemens," he continued. "This is Bendigo from the booths over the ways. Wants my patrons to pay a shillings to see me box him in Levi Eckersley's shows. No. I won't have it. I box in my own booths and nowheres elses. His sweet-hearts won't let him come insides for a rounds or twos, so I begs of you, gentlemens, to step insides, and I will box anybodys who likes as wells as telling everybodys what will win the St. Legers."

Two show-front musicians scraped a fiddle and blew a fife, whilst Deaf Burke began to jig and caper to the music.

"Now, gentlemens, the performance is about to begins," he cried. After throwing boxing gloves to confederates in the crowd, and making his way down the rickety steps, he dived into the tent. The man who had pointed Bendigo out to Deaf Burke was now talking to a bruiser with a broken nose, gap-toothed, and ear-marked, of the ring. He had evidently received his instructions, for, dropping off the other end of the

show front with a bludgeon, or weighted stick, under his arm, he sauntered after Bendigo and Cherry Ribbons.

They had turned away from the boxing booth and were walking over the moor towards the gypsy caravan.

“Are you not ashamed of a Romany lass being called your sweetheart, Blue Birdseye?” Zillah teased with bright eyes and provoking lips.

“I should be the other way on if it was true,” Bendy answered.

“What, proud of a roaming gypsy?”

“Ay, if she was my sweetheart.”

“Well, I’m not that,” Zillah retorted almost fiercely, “and I never shall be, for we of the Rye do not marry out of our tents.”

“Then why did you say anything about being my sweetheart?”

“It was Deaf Burke on the show front,” she faltered. “You have been a good friend to me, and we must always be good friends, Blue Birdseye. There is a plot against you, and somebody would have paid Deaf Burke well to have made a chopping-block of you.”

“He’s welcome enough to try.”

“But not with enemies all round the ropes,” Zillah said quickly. “I heard of what was going on. Buck Castleton is behind it all. I left my finger marks on his face when he tried to kiss me, and since you milled him the bandbox of York Barracks dare not show his face at Doncaster.”

“So Nat Flatman told you?”

“Indeed, Nat did not. I saw the fight myself. I hid amongst the gorse when I saw him coming, and crept to the back of the caravan to watch what happened. I could scarcely help shouting to you to smash his face, though you did it well enough without my telling. But this swell is only stopped, not beaten.

Buck Castleton has no scruples, and he will hire ruffians to waylay you for thrashing him, or it may be try to carry me off as he did the innkeeper's daughter at Beverley. The innkeeper hushed it up for gold, but only the buck's blood would hush it up amongst the Romany Rye, and I should not go tamely. There is a loaded gun inside the caravan, and I have shot rabbits on the heath. The stars and the cards both foretell a violent death for Buck Castleton. He will die in the hunting field and be carried on a hurdle covered up with a horsecloth. But I shall rue the day that he met me out fortune telling. There seems a black curse on our caravan."

"There's a black curse on this dandy who calls himself an officer and a gentleman," Bendy growled. "The sooner he breaks his neck the better."

"I wish to God he would, Blue Birdseye."

That ramble along the Town Moor with Cherry Ribbons came perilously near sweethearting. She had come to warn him, and she lingered to bewitch him. She was a creature of the sun and air, and, poacher though he had been by field and stream, Bendigo was taken in her snares, by her bright eyes, her luring lips, the gloom and glimmer of her gypsy tresses, shining with little glass jewels like stars in midnight. Her swarthy skin was loveliness itself, resembling a complexion of cream and roses sunburned and smoked at a gypsy fire. There was something fawn-like in her walk, and deer-like in her eyes. Bendigo had seen ladies of fashion at Doncaster for the races, but none of them so beautiful as this gypsy girl, whose boudoir was a corner in a caravan with a cracked mirror hanging up, whose jewels were mostly the gee-gaws of a country fair, whose silk attire was a dress of patched

colors. They walked some little time in silence, during which he threw side glances of admiration at her.

“Are you thinking of the days when you shall be champion of England, Blue Birdseye?” she shot at him.

“Not I,” Bendigo answered. “I was thinking how pretty you look.”

She curtsied mockingly.

“If I had a ring for every time I have been told that I should be covered with jewels.”

She flashed her fingers, which sparkled with curious rings and glass gems.

“You have more rings than fingers already,” said he.

“I shall wear one more when I am caught and tamed, which will not be yet awhile,” she laughed.

“Until then you will be hunted by such sporting gentry as the buck of York Barracks,” Bendy said bitterly.

She gave a half-contemptuous, half-amused shrug, that set every jewel sparkling, and jingled her gypsy bangles.

“He is a viper in the heather, and yet he paid me rather a pretty compliment. He said I went to his head like wine.”

“Yes, and that’s why I had to tap his claret,” Bendigo grinned.

“Blue Birdseye you’re a queer card,” she laughed. “Who was it gave you that new silk neckerchief?”

“A lady,” Bendy answered her.

“I like you so much, Blue Birdseye, that if I had her here, I would mill her for it.”

Bendy laughed out loud as his mother’s words came back to him from the lips of Cherry Ribbons. Beau-

tiful as she was, he knew how soon his mother's jealous passion would spoil her beauty.

Zillah flamed up like a gorse fire.

"Let the other woman have you!" she scoffed. "I care nothing. There is little difference between the buck who fancies a woman and the gorgio who fancies two."

"What is it you are angry about?"

"The silk belcher round your neck."

She pulled a silk scarf warm from her bosom out of her laced gypsy bodice. It was scented with lavender and of a bright orange color.

"I have this for you."

"But these are my fighting colors," Bendy said.

"Wear mine then—it is a prettier favor than the other. To wear her handkerchief is like having a woman's arm round your neck."

"It is my mother's arm," Bendigo answered.

The angry flame died out of Cherry Ribbon's face. "I wish I had my mother's arm clinging round my neck," she almost sobbed. "But I never knew what it was. She died in a snowstorm, when I was a child, walking from a country market to our caravan. I was brought up by my stepmother, and my playthings were birds and butterflies and frogs and beetles—bright eyes peeping out of hedges, and strange things creeping in ditches, or keeping warm in the grass. I learned by experience that nettles sting and that the law of the open air is tooth and claw. It is the same in the country village, in the market town, and on Doncaster Moor. Tooth and claw is the law of life. We are now close to our caravan. Will you not wear my pretty favor?"

She laid her shining lures about him—the lure of bright eyes, cherry lips, teasing ringlets, provoking dimples, a coaxing smile. But he felt his mother's

arm around his neck, and the scent of lavender brought back to him how she had tramped to Hucknall to hear ringside news of his fight with Ben Caunt.

“I can’t take off my mother’s blue belcher,” he said. “That’s my fighting color. But I will wear your favor o’ Sundays.”

Zillah’s eyes blazed. She stamped her foot on the ground and turned disdainfully away from him.

“I want a chal who will think of me every day in the week and not only o’ Sundays,” she cried angrily. “Let the heather grow between me and you, gorgio.”

So saying, she thrust the silk scarf back in her bosom and went away towards the caravan of her own people.

Bendigo was now a young man with a grievance, determined not to look round unless Cherry Ribbons called him back, and on her part, she was just as determined not to do anything of the kind. This provided a golden opportunity for the broken-nosed man with the bludgeon. He saw his chance of earning easy money, came out of ambush, and followed Bendigo. By a bit of luck the sun threw his shadow behind instead of in front of Bendigo. But there were other points not altogether in his favor. In contrast to Deaf Burke, Bendigo was very quick on the ears, and he caught the faint rustle of footsteps behind him. He smiled to himself, thinking that Cherry Ribbons was following him.

But by this time Zillah had entered the caravan, and her first act was to glance out of the pane of bottle-glass which overlooked the moor. She saw the man with the bludgeon skulking after Bendigo, and a piercing scream broke from her lips. Her stepmother, making pillow lace, dropped her bobbins. The Fight-

ing Tinman, who had just put a new whiplash on an old stock, came running up with it in his hand

"What is it?" they both asked Zillah.

"There's a man trying to murder Blue Birdseye, the milling gorgio on the moor. Look!"

Zillah's scream had saved Bendigo from a broken head or more severe injuries. He spun round just as the man behind him swung his weighted stick. Bendigo ducked the blow, and sent his assailant staggering with a smash in his face. Being a bruiser by profession, he dropped his bludgeon and took to his fists instinctively.

He was battle-scarred by contests in the ring, but he had never been hit so hard or so often during his varied career as now. Felled to the grass for the third time, he decided to stay there until he got an opportunity of playing "Hookey Walker." Zillah and the Tinman came up as he lay sprawled out, declining Bendy's invitation to get up and have some more.

Zillah tore the whip from the Tinman's hand, and lashed the man on the ground furiously, until he sprang up and ran for his life.

"I saw him on Deaf Burke's show front," she said. "He is a bad lot. He might have killed you, Blue Birdseye."

"He's got a bit of an old grudge against me. I drank out of his jug of beer without asking him at Sheffield."

"Come and drink out of ours," said the Tinman, taking his whip from Zillah. "I won a pot of money over you at Appleby, my lad." He strode on ahead of them, cracking his whip every few yards.

"The heather has brought us together again, Blue Birdseye, and I am going to make it up with a kiss," Cherry Ribbons whispered.

All the beauty of the heath seemed to cling to him as her brown arms, jingling with the prettiness of gypsy gee-gaws, caught him unawares. The heather laughed around, a lark rose singing out of the sweet of it, and the Fighting Tinman went stolidly on ahead of them, crack-crack-cracking his whip.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEAF 'UN HEARS MORE THAN HE BARGAINED FOR

LEVI ECKERSLEY had pitched on every race course in the country, and knew all the notabilities.

"That tall and fashionably dressed covey is John Gully, M.P.," he said to Bendigo before the St. Leger was run. "He fought Hen Pearce, 'the Game Chicken,' and beat Bob Gregson, the Lancashire giant, twice. He and his partner, Bobby Ridsdale, won £100,000 between them over the Derby and Sellinger last year."

There was a grace and dignity about John Gully that many a Corinthian nobleman might, and probably did, envy. He stood square-shouldered, surveying the scene with penetrating gray eyes, under penthouse brows. The Ring and the Turf between them had given him a stern-set face, hard and unrelenting, which the graying years had lined in.

"I've heard the Duke speak of Bobby Ridsdale," Bendigo said. "His brother, Squire Ridsdale, of Hucknall Torkard, backed Ben Caunt against me."

"John Gully and Ridsdale are not partners now. Had a turn-up in the hunting field. Gully laid about Ridsdale with a riding whip and gave him a dressing down. Bobby went to law over it and got the verdict. Gully had to pay £500, but he can sport the rhino out of what he's made on the Turf. He's feeding his sneezer out of Lord Chetwynd's snuff-box. But if we stand here ogling the swells we shall miss the race."

Although the field was small it was a good race. Queen of Trumps, the favorite, took the lead, kept it, and won by a good length. The Yorkshire roar was

still in the air when Eckersley drew Bendigo away from the rails.

"What's the Deaf 'Un up to over there?"

Deaf Burke was entertaining a party of Toms and Jerrys on the top of a coach and the gay dogs included several young swells who looked like cavalry officers in mufti. The sun was on the window and Bendigo caught a fleeting glimpse of a puffy face pressed to the glass. The buck of York Barracks had seen the St. Leger run from the inside of the coach.

"The Deaf 'Un's getting champagne with the swells, and he won't open his boxing booth as long as there's a bottle of fizz about," Eckersley said. "Now's the time to make a bit of blunt whilst the rhino's flowing. We'd better get the company together and give a show."

So they lined up on the front of their booth and Jasper wore all the rosin off his bow fiddling old jigs and tunes. But there did not seem to be anything doing, and Eckersley began to think that after all it was scarcely worth while opening. In a final effort to get a crowd together, he blew loudly on the post-horn that had been left behind by one of the friends and supporters of the cock-eyed Coachman.

Either this changed their luck, or something else must have done so, for to their surprise, soon afterwards the booth was besieged by sporting swells, and as they appeared to have lots of "blunt," the proprietor doubled the prices of admission. The "nobs" made no complaint on that score, and many of them did not trouble about taking their change.

"It's because Deaf Burke's booth is shut up, I suppose," Eckersley said. "Anyhow, we're doing well, and this show will soon be full."

Bendy was holding up a pair of boxing gloves on

the show front, and inviting any member of his audience to come in and put them on.

"Who'll have 'em on with Bendigo, the Nottingham champion?" Eckersley challenged through his yard of tin.

"I'll have a rounds or twos with him," Deaf Burke called out from the thick of the crowd.

A likely explanation of why they were doing so well dawned on Eckersley. The Deaf 'Un was up to some of his tricks.

"Don't take him on," he advised Bendigo.

But Bendigo had already spotted Burke standing among the swells from the top of the coach which had contained Captain Castleton, and throwing him the gloves he chaffed, "Come inside, Deaf 'Un, and I'll box you which of us is to be champion of England!"

The swells in the tent had pulled the baize curtain aside, and were plainly prepared to demand their money back if Bendigo had refused to box Deaf Burke. But they gave him an ironical ovation now, and the Deaf 'Un's Corinthian supporters made a rush for the entrance. But Eckersley, Bendy, and the other members of the company blocked the way.

"Egad! If you don't let us in we'll push the show over," one young blood threatened.

"Not without paying," Eckersley persisted.

"Oh, dash it all, let's pay the fellow's funeral expenses," one of the cavalry officers drawled. "Will a tenner do for the lot?"

Eckersley nodded, and they all passed into the booth, with the exception of the cavalry swell, who handed a crisp banknote over.

"There you are," he said. "Pull the curtains to, now, and close the show. We don't want any of the traps in here. Station a man outside to say it's full,

and don't let anyone else in. I've paid my tenner and I want my money's worth."

"I suppose, gentlemen, there's room for just one more at the same price?" said a tall man, with granite-gray eyes and graying hair, rustling a ten-pound note as he stepped forward.

"Egad! it's Gully," the young swell said, flabbergasted.

The heavy gray eyebrows built grim arches across the rugged and stern-set face of John Gully, and the quiver of his fine nostrils showed him at that moment a thoroughbred of sport.

"Yes, and I don't think you'll refuse admission to me as an old champion of England. I've been looking all round for a bit of good sparring, and it seems that I am to see it here."

Bendigo had gone into the show. Eckersley stood respectfully aside to let Mr. Gully pass in, but the cavalry officer seemed a trifle undetermined, until he saw the wrath arising in the ex-champion's hard face, and marked his breadth of shoulder.

"Pass Gully in, showman," he drawled. "You can please yourself about bagging his flimsy, but set a guard at the door to stop anyone else getting in. I'm going inside now."

Eckersley could see that the gray-haired old sportsman was tempted to knock the supercilious young fop through the show. But Gully had sworn never to raise his fist against a man after he bade farewell to the ring. He was so irate, though, that he had crumpled the tenner in his clenched hand. He smoothed the flimsy out, and giving it over to Eckersley, said grimly:

"It's a good thing I hadn't a horsewhip, or there might have been another claim against me for damages."

"Don't mind him, sir," returned Eckersley. "The tent's full of Toms and Jerrys of the same kidney. I don't know what their little game is. Deaf Burke's come in here for a set-to with Bendigo, and that seems to be providing the attraction. I'm afraid the Deaf 'Un's going to make a chopping-block of our man."

"I heard about it, and I came along to see fair play as well as a bit of sparring."

John Gully stooped as Eckersley drew aside the green baize to allow him to enter. All eyes were turned upon him. And well they might be, for this undaunted, although gray-headed notability, looked quite capable of clearing the tent single-handed if it came to a tussle.

Levi Eckersley ran the green baize curtain to on its jingling brass rings, and stationed a man outside to inform the public that the show was full for the performance. Then he announced that the programme would open with a set-to between himself and Peter Taylor, followed by a comical turn-up between Jasper and the blackamoor. But the Corinthian ringsiders had the ill-manners to howl him down, and the young military bloods from York Barracks declared they had paid their money to see a set-to between Deaf Burke and Bendigo.

More to safeguard himself from the law than anything, Eckersley maintained that he had never announced any such contest from the show front, and he had no hand in promoting it. One of the swells sarcastically remarked that all the money had passed through his hands, anyhow, and without further parley Bendigo vaulted the low ropes into the ring. He put the swells in a good humor by going through some acrobatic tricks and clowning, that made them all laugh.

Deaf Burke, being well primed with champagne,

jumped over the ropes, and began to turn cartwheels in the ring.

"Oh! dammit all, Deaf 'Un, what are you mud-larking at?" a Corinthian with an eyeglass complained. "This is a boxing booth, not a sawdust ring. We might as well be at Astley's. We shall have you careering round the arena as Mazeppa next."

But Deaf Burke was in his element. Arm-in-arm with Bendigo he walked round the ring, both of them pulling the most comical faces.

"Oh, quoz! What a shocking bad hat," he grinned, knocking a fashionable beaver hat off as they passed.

"Damn that for a tale," retorted the aggrieved owner of the beaver, reaching for his hat back again. "It was made by Baxter, the London hatmaker, and cost me five guineas."

This raised a general laugh, and Bendigo improved the occasion by mimicking Burke. "Gentlemens, I shall be champions of Englands when I have beat the Deaf 'Uns. Until thens, if Jem Wards offers me the belts, I shall say, 'Take it aways, I won't have its.'"

The countryman, as the swells called Bendy, was more quick-witted than they had bargained for, and he was just as cocksure of himself as Deaf Burke. Like the Deaf 'Un, he seemed to be enjoying himself immensely, and they gave an impromptu knockabout performance that made the tent sway with laughter.

But there was another knockabout performance to come, and, grinning as usual, Bendigo announced that he and Burke would now have the gloves on, and try to knock one another's knowledge-boxes off for love.

The champagne was now getting stale in Deaf Burke, and it left a viciousness behind, on which Captain Castleton's friends had probably calculated when they primed him up for the occasion. Jem Burke

was the most experienced glove-fighter of his time. Mufflers and "mawlies" were both of the same to him, for he had practically lived by his fists ever since he began life as a "jack-in-the-water" on the Thames. He was on velvet with the gloves, and he had been well paid by the toffs to take what he would have called "the conceits" out of Bendigo. So he set to work to give them their money's worth.

He feinted with the left and brought his right across with a swing in that ought to have knocked Bendy off his pins. But it was dead easy to duck, and as it passed over his nob, Bendy propped the Deaf 'Un with a stiff right-hander, knocking him up against the ropes, which, not having much give and take in them, let him down at the feet of his swell supporters. Some of the Corinthians tried to cover up their champion's discredit with the ashes of contempt:—"Deaf 'Un, you're drunk!" they howled.

Burke got up and glared at them.

"Who's says I'm drunks—I won't have its!"

Then he dashed at Bendy and got it again, for the elusive Midlander side-stepped his rush, and uppercut him in passing. The ringside swells were astounded. It looked as if Deaf Burke had met his match, and more than his match, in this unknown from the country. The drink in him may have had something to do with it, but try as he would, he could not hit Bendigo off his feet. Bendy had a reserve of quick wit that served him well. He was all eyes, like the old blue-birdseye. It did not bother him that Burke was the champion. What he had to do was stop him and hit him as hard as he could with the gloves. Bendy was in fine trim, and he ducked and dodged until Deaf Burke began to think he must be as drunk as the swells said.

Bendigo knocked him back to the ropes again, and

this time his disappointed supporters turned on the Deaf 'Un.

"He's milling you," they scoffed. "Nice sort of a champion you are to fight old Jem Ward!

Burke worried the mufflers off his hands with his teeth. "I must be drunks," he hiccuped craftily, although he was now more sober than he had been all day, "but if I'm as drunks as blazes, I bets anybody's quids I mills him with the mawlies."

He had got into bare knuckles now, and gnawed the air with twitching hands.

"Here, that won't do," Levi Eckersley interposed. "We shall all get in quod over it."

"Let 'em fight with the raw 'uns," the swells insisted. "Damn the Doncaster bluebottles."

"I'm ready to fight the Deaf 'Un to a finish," Bendy said with a cheerful grin. "The one who wins to have the first claim on Jem Ward for the championship belt."

"Hear! hear!" John Gully said in his strong, heavy voice from the ringside. "If we're in for a penny we might as well be in for a pound—or fifty pounds for that matter. I'll back Bendigo up to that amount against Deaf Burke at even money."

Dead silence hung over the booth, and the Deaf 'Un grew more sober than he had ever been in his life.

"I'm drunks," he hiccuped, "but I'm not as drunks as all thats. I'll not fight him heres. Us won't have its. Let him go and fights some of the mens I have beaten before he challenges me. It's Jem Wards I wants to meets, not Bendigos. I'm drunks as a lords, so good-days everybody's."

CHAPTER XV

A GAME AT SKITTLES

THE swells saw things from Burke's point of view, and helped him out of the booth. But John Gully clapped Bendigo on the back and said: "Keep to the ring, my lad. Some day you'll fight Burke and beat him, too. If you care to come along with me to the Reindeer Inn, I'll introduce you to some of the Corinthians who are down for the races. There is a highflier among them with whom I would like to see you put the gloves on. He has a reputation for hard hitting and hard drinking, and is known as Buck Castleton."

Mr. Gully glanced shrewdly at Bendigo to see how he took it, and continued with something in his manner that rankled deeper than irony, "He goes the pace and prides himself on being a Lushingtonian as well as a Corinthian. He was so drunk two days ago before the Leger that he fell off a turn-out he was tooling and damaged his face."

"If he says so, he's a liar," Bendigo bluntly declared. "I milled him on the moor."

"That's what Nat Flatman told me. A young milling cove called Bendigo gave the buck as much as he could take home, and a bit of overweight, Nat said. By the looks of him he got a damned good milling. My only regret is that I was not there to see him take it. For Buck Castleton is little better than a horse-poisoner, and if this had been Newmarket instead of Doncaster, he'd have been ducked in a horsepond before now. It's no secret in the stables that he tried to nobble the favorite, and I'll throw it in his teeth if Osbaldeston pistols me twice over."

Mr. Gully was in the mood to open his mind and continued, "Castleton is a friend of George Osbaldeston, and the Squire is making a fuss about my laying a horsewhip across Ridsdale's shoulders. He has twitted me before company about being an ex-prizefighter of ill manners, and, by Gad, it took me all my time to keep my hands off him, although it is notorious that the old Squire is one of the best pistol shots in England. He's a good sportsman, but a little man, and I should prefer to let him pick the quarrel with me. I can deal with his friend Buck Castleton better if it comes to a public thrashing. They shall both of them find that although John Gully is a gray cinder they can't handle him without burning their fingers." He turned suddenly on Bendigo, saying: "Come with me to the Reindeer and we'll have it out face to face with the old fox hunter and the young buck if he hasn't slipped cover."

So they set off together for the Reindeer Inn, and as they drew near to it, Boshier, the old bruiser and fiddler, was thrown out of the doorway fighting and struggling.

"Let me get at Buck Castleton," he shouted. "I'll mark him. We've risked getting locked up for him and haven't had a shilling off him yet."

The broken-nosed man slunk back on seeing Bendigo. "I've had enough of you," he snarled. "What the Monday morning and Tuesday afternoon have you got to do with it?"

"Did you carry a note from Captain Castleton to one of Mr. Mostyn's stable lads before the St. Leger was run?" Gully asked the fellow in a high-pitched voice.

"Yes, I did, and a bottle of blue physic, too, for the favorite."

"Come inside," Gully said to Bendigo. He entered the parlor, whilst Bendy respectfully stood just outside the door. Buck Castleton, white with anger, met the unruffled Gully. Beside him bristled the small, trim-built figure of Squire Osbaldeston, hot with fury. There were Corinthian swells all round, adjusting their frills and stocks, after the unwonted exertion of throwing the broken-nosed man out of the door.

The lead-lozenged casement of the room stood wide open. It overlooked Doncaster High-street, and every word Gully uttered had penetrated into the four corners of the room, as he had intended. Osbaldeston set back his ears like a dog at a badger. The six-foot buck of York Barracks squared his military shoulders and glared out of eyes that were still puffy and discolored.

"What the devil do you mean by asking the fellow such an impertinent question as that, Gully?" he demanded.

John Gully towered alongside Buck Castleton, looking as gray and threatening as the badger at which the old Squire was bristling. His eyes and teeth gleamed together, and instinctively Bendy knew there was a fight in the air.

"Surely, Captain Castleton, neither you nor your friends can be unaware that your recent attempt to nobble Queen of Trumps is the talk of the stables. The trick you used was worthy of Dan Dawson, the notorious horse-poisoner. It is common knowledge that you sent a blue bottle of physic to a stable lad who was in your pay some hours before the Leger was run. The man outside carried your message."

The pugnacious Gully, with upthrown head and beetling brows, his nostrils scornful and lips curved in contempt, glared full into Castleton's shifty eyes

until the buck lowered them with a curse that sounded almost like a whimper.

"By God, Gully, I'll have you cut for this!"

"Isn't this the house where Sir William Maxwell broke all the looking glasses in a mad frolic after his horse, Filho da Puta, won the Leger in '15?" Gully asked the landlord.

"It is, sir."

"Then it's a bad thing for Castleton that somebody hasn't broken all the mirrors this year," Gully said, addressing the room generally. "If he looks in any of them, he will still see some traces of the thrashing he got on the morning of the St. Leger, from Bendigo, a bruiser belonging to Levi Eckersley's boxing booth, who is now standing on the other side of the door."

"If this fellow says he milled Castleton, he's a liar. He couldn't do it," one of the Corinthian swells cried. "Why, I'll mill him myself for a bit of diversion."

He threw off an elegantly cut coat, displaying an intricately ruffled shirt with frilled sleeves, and squared up at Bendy. They met in the doorway, and the next moment the swell lay sprawled out at Buck Castleton's feet, having been knocked clean through it by Bendigo.

"Damnation! This shan't end with fisticuffs," Squire Osbaldeston blazed. "You shall answer to me for this, John Gully. Captain Castleton is my friend."

Gully bowed ironically.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Squire. You have thought fit to twit me upon the social inferiority of my pugilistic acquaintances. I have brought one of them with me to substantiate the fact that he milled Castleton on the morning before the St. Leger. The gallant captain met with no coaching misadventure. As to his attempt to nobble the favorite, I have absolute proof of it. He can scarcely deny that up to the last

moment he was betting heavily against Queen of Trumps, which was a mad thing to do without expecting some untoward event to happen. The superiority of the favorite to any other horse in the race was never for a moment in question. But if it had been dosed with physic from the blue bottle——! Keep back, Castleton!"

But the infuriated buck had flung himself at Gully and engaged in a struggle with him. The old champion of England swung him off his feet, lifted him up, and threw him neck and crop across the room, his friends making way for him to fall. As it was, he carried a table with him and lay amongst splintered glasses, a rucked-up damask tablecloth, and broken wine bottles.

"There's your friend, Osbaldeston. Pick him up," Gully said curtly. "Although over fifty years of age, I've never met the bully I couldn't handle yet."

The fiery little Squire bounded forward with clenched fists, being an excellent boxer for his weight. But Gully dropped his hands.

"No, I'm not going to be tempted to use my fists again, Squire," he said. "I swore not to hit any man with my fists after I left the ring, and I have kept my word so far. I am ready to meet you with your own weapons."

"Pistols!" Osbaldeston snapped.

Gully bowed. "As you please. Swords would suit me quite as well. I know nothing about either."

"By God, you will before you've done with it," fumed the furious little Squire. But he only struck fire out of flint.

"Mr. Osbaldeston," Gully said with great calmness and dignity and a careful regard for genteel diction, "you presume rather too much upon your facility with

firearms. You may have hit the wafer at Manton's more times than Captain Gronow, for all I know. But I allow no man to intimidate me either with his pistols or his opinions. Do me the credit to believe, sir, that when it comes to a point of honor I don't care a damn for your pistols or the reputation you have for handling them."

By this time Buck Castleton had been helped up from the floor and was beside himself with rage.

"After Osbaldeston has done with you it will be my turn," he growled, glaring at Gully.

"In that case I shall be more at home, for my weapon will be a horsewhip."

CHAPTER XVI

LORD LAVENDER'S SNUFF-BOX

"You won't need to challenge him," Osbaldeston fumed. "I'll never drink another glass of wine until I've put a bullet through him."

As the old Squire was a three-bottle man—port, sherry, or claret—and the finest shot in the shires, the sportsmen present regarded this as sealing the fate of John Gully, since Osbaldeston never went back on his word.

With a careless, but by no means a contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders—for, knowing Osbaldeston's reputation, he reckoned on his keeping his threat—Gully said: "The only favor I ask is that there shall be no delay. I am going to see a Doncaster solicitor at once, and put my affairs in order. I shall leave a few bottles of champagne for any gentlemen present to drink my health if they should care to do so, in case I do not see them again. Landlord, if you will make out a bill for the glasses Castleton has broken, I will see that they are paid for. If any gentleman has a claim on me, will he please present it now. I want this affair to be carried through as expeditiously as possible. Is there any gentleman present who will act on my behalf?"

"By Gad, Gully, I should think so. I will, with the greatest of pleasure," said the swell Bendigo had knocked down. He was mopping his nose with a little frilled handkerchief. The ruffles of his shirt-front were plentifully besprinkled with "claret," but he showed a fine contempt for the ruby vintage.

"I'll look after your interest. Leave the arrangements entirely with me," he said, flourishing the hectic handkerchief.

Bendy stood gaping in at the door. He did not quite understand high life amongst the swells. But John Gully shook hands warmly with the gentleman who had so promptly offered to befriend him.

"I leave everything in your lordship's hands with the fullest confidence," he answered.

Bendy winced. He had evidently knocked a nobleman off his pins, and done it in no half-hearted manner either. But if the Corinthian bore a coronet upon his coat-of-arms and ruffles on his shirt-front, he apparently bore Bendy no malice, for he approached him in a most affable manner, holding out a jewelled snuff-box.

"I say, my good fellow, what name do you go by?"

"Bendigo."

"Well, Bendigo, will you accept this snuff-box as a keepsake. I'm glad I've met you, and I hope to meet you again, but I shall take the precaution of putting the mufflers on next time I spar with you."

Bendy grinned, bobbed his head, and accepted the snuff-box. But he was not much of a snuff-taker, and after a heavy pinch he sneezed himself into the tap-room of the Reindeer, where the atmosphere was more congenial.

"Who's that cove with the frills?" he asked the landlord over a mug of beer.

"Lord Lavender—he's a regular out-and-outer. I understand he is to be Mr. Gully's second. I hope there'll be no blood spilt over this quarrel, but I mis-doubt there will be."

Bendy hoped the same. In fact, he deeply regretted having drawn his lordship's "cork," and he was half in the mind to offer him his silk belcher in place of that

frilled cambric handkerchief. It was such a little feminine affair!

Two hours later Gully and Osbaldeston stood facing each other on a level stretch of grass. Loaded pistols were handed to them by their seconds. Osbaldeston examined his with the eye and experience of an expert. He also measured up Gully with a quick glance. "I'm damned if the Squire doesn't put me in mind of an undertaker taking his man's measure," one of the on-lookers said aloud.

The grim smile that sometimes lurked in the corners of Gully's hard mouth twitched across his face. He could see Bobby Ridsdale's figure taking aim behind Osbaldeston. The horse-whipping of Ridsdale had made him vastly unpopular amongst fox-hunting men, and the fox-hunting old Squire was preparing to settle the account.

It was a sweet bit of grass but the blink and gleam of the pistols made Bendigo think of coffin plates. He was slipping behind a green bush where he could see what happened without being observed when he fell over Levi Eckersley's legs. Not that he knew the legs belonged to Eckersley until he rose out of the thick bracken and claimed them.

"Rum go this and no gammon," he said shaking his head. "Here's a peep-hole that's as good as a glaze for a sharp pair of ogles. The tall covey with his back towards us is John Gully, and the little stiff covey with the red face is Squire Osbaldeston. The little Squire is about to polish off Mr. Gully with a percussion cap, a pistol, and politeness. Osbaldeston can hit any button of Gully's coat he likes at the twenty paces they've measured off. Blowed if I like seeing the elderly gentleman who fought Hen Pearce turned into cold mutton."

"I wish the Duke was here to take Squire Osbaldeston on instead of Mr. Gully," Bendigo said. "He always carries a pair of pistols in his coat tails."

"Must be an out-and-outer, your friend, the Duke," Eckersley ejaculated. "Why, the damned things might pop off when he sits down. The little Squire reminds me of that cock-eyed Coachman at nine stone ten."

Lord Lavender made a final attempt at reconciliation, but it was hopeless. "I'm going to put a bullet through him," Osbaldeston obdurately declared. "Give the word, and let's get it over."

"I'm not going to take upon myself the responsibility of spilling two good men's blood," his lordship said. "I've lost enough of my own, so Jimmy Harrington will oblige."

"Be damned to your last-minute scruples," Osbaldeston growled. "The distance has been paced and you're acting for Gully. Everything's in his favor."

"Look here, Osbaldeston, if you want to quarrel with me I'll take Gully's place with all the pleasure in the world."

Osbaldeston was so enraged that he nearly blazed at Lord Lavender whilst Mr. Gully stood with an ironical smile playing about his lips, as cool as the pistol in his hand. Jimmy Harrington, a sportsman of the old school, stood forward, and Lord Lavender stood back. Between them they had contrived an ingenious little plan for diverting the old Squire's aim and preventing a fatal termination of the duel if that were possible.

"Happy to oblige," said Jimmy Harrington, and gave the signal by throwing up a colored silk handkerchief. Osbaldeston's eye was taken by the fluttering handkerchief as it fell. He aimed high. The pistols cracked out and puffs of blue smoke straggled in the

air. Gully had fired into the bushes, but his fashionable beaver hat flew off, and when he picked it up, there was a bullet-hole through it letting in the daylight from one side to the other.

"Better through my hat than through my head," he said with the utmost coolness.

"Re-charge the pistols or give us another pair," Osbaldeston fumed.

"No, be demned to that," Lord Lavender said. "You've spoiled a good beaver, and I'm not going to let you spoil a good head. Beside, you've kept your word, and put a bullet through Gully."

A laugh relieved the strain of the situation, and the next moment Osbaldeston and Gully shook hands.

Eckersley pointed to the wad of Gully's pistol smouldering in the bracken yards nearer to him than it was to Bendigo.

"Phew!" he said, blowing through his lips. "Who'd have thought of Gully banging at the cock sparrow and nearly hitting one of 'em! Come over to the Reindeer, and have a mug of heavy wet. I'm better off than I might have been by just as many goldfinches as I've got in my pockets. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

As they sat over their porter, principals, seconds, and spectators trooped into the Reindeer from the duel, and hilarious remarks were made about Gully's new mode of ventilating his beaver.

The story, said one witty gentleman, would take the town, and set a new fashion in London hats, with eyelet holes in 'em.

"Begad, why not get Osbaldeston to shoot 'em in," he added gaily, as an afterthought.

The old squire cocked an eye at him, but it twinkled.

In the thick of the Corinthians, Mr. Gully handed an envelope over to Osbaldeston.

"In case I had been killed, this would have come into your hands," he said.

It contained a note that Buck Castleton had written to the stable lad he had bribed to physic Queen of Trumps, and I.O.U's amounting to £200, which he owed Gully on the St. Leger.

The old Squire grew red in the gills.

"I ought to have called him out in place of you, Gully," he said regretfully. "It is too late now. I fight only with gentlemen—not tricksters. But if I meet Castleton here again, I shall certainly get the stableman to introduce him to a horse trough."

"In that case I'll have it cleaned out afterwards," Gully said sardonically.

His cold eyes took in the room, and particularly some of Buck Castleton's friends, as if inviting them to put another bullet through his hat. The little Squire stood bristling beside him with his ears up, but he only heard the smash of a glass knocked off the table by Jimmy Harrington's contemptuous hand.

"By Gad, Gully, I'll buy you another hat, and one of Baxter's best," chuckled Osbaldeston. "What's the size of your headpiece?"

CHAPTER XVII

A CARAVAN OF DREAMS

"FIRST it was pistols that popped—now it's corks," Levi Eckersley said. "Hark at 'em bouncing in the next room."

A waiter came to them and asked if they would take champagne or port with their dinner at Mr. Gully's invitation.

"No fizz or blackstrap for me," Eckersley said. "Another fill-up of heavy wet, and as regards eatables, mutton and smash with a serving of caper sauce. Nothing like capers, my fine covey. Some coves cut 'em; I eat 'em."

"Buck Castleton's going to leave Doncaster to-night, from what I can gather," the tapster at the Reindeer told Bendigo, after Eckersley had departed with a toothpick in his mouth. "He's hired a chaise and four to be ready for him at midnight, so there'll be some mad driving on the road to York."

"Here's to him landing in a ditch, and breaking his neck," Bendy growled, emptying his glass and preparing to leave.

Nat Flatman, the jockey, stood at his elbow.

"There's some devilry on to-night that I can't make out," he said. "A rough customer has hired a couple of nags from the mews below in Buck Castleton's name, and there were two or three coves with knobsticks hanging about outside."

Looking round cautiously to see that no one was listening the little jockey reached up to Bendigo's ear.

"I wonder if they're after the gypsy girl that Buck

Castleton took a fancy to," he whispered, and slipped back into the room where the swells were gathered.

Bendigo set off from the inn with the words singing in his ears, and walked briskly across the dark moor towards the Tinman's caravan. As he drew near it the dog crept out and began barking at him. It was fastened up under the caravan as of old. A light burned inside, and there was no sign of danger, so after watching for some minutes, Bendigo retraced his steps. They were sitting up in the boxing booth playing cards by candlelight when he arrived. He told them some of the swells were out for a frolic, but Eckersley laughed, and said they wouldn't be likely to attack milling coves who could look after themselves. Jasper shuffled to the flap of the tent once or twice and stared into the night.

"Are you looking out for them?" Bendy asked him.

"No, but I thought I could hear the old lurcher barking as it used to do when a gamekeeper or poacher disturbed it at night."

"You did hear the dog. It's tied up under the old caravan." Jasper looked hard at him. "Brother, what made you go over the heath?"

"I thought Captain Castleton might be up to some of his games."

"Curse him! But his fate is written in the stars up there as well as mine and yours. No man can get away from his destiny, for wherever he walks the sky is shining over his head."

Jasper lowered his voice and repeated solemnly, "It's all written in the stars." After a pause he added: "And the stars will tell you that no good ever came of a gorgio falling in love with a Romany girl. It's the tents and the open road for her. The call of blood to blood is stronger than the love of a man for a maid, just as these ancient lights in the sky are stronger than

the pack of greasy cards they are playing with. Brother, I tell you this under the stars. A man or woman of the Rye will go back to the black tent on the heath as a dog creeps back to the boot that kicked it”

It was two o'clock in the morning. A lantern lighted the booth and the candle in it was guttering. The wind blew across the Town Moor in the direction of sleepy Doncaster, and carried the staccato barking of a dog across the darkness. Disturbed by it, Bendigo rose with a rustle from his shakedown of straw and joined Jasper, who again stood at the opening in the tent, letting in the cool wind and scintillating starlight.

“Come outside,” he said laconically. As they stood under the stars he pointed to the direction of Cherry Ribbon's caravan.

“There's something going on over there. Hark at that dog! The sharp barking suddenly changed to the dismal, drawn-out howling of an animal that is being kicked or savagely ill-used. A swift silence ensued, startling in its intensity.

“They've either knocked the senses out of the lurcher, or killed it,” Jasper snarled.

Bendigo rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. His jaw stiffened. “It's Buck Castleton's lot. They're carrying off Cherry Ribbons.”

An oath slipped from the gypsy's lips, and with one impulse they dashed together into the night. They raced across the moor like greyhounds, urged on by the dull rumble of wheels. A caravan was tearing over the heath towards the highroad. It was being drawn by a couple of horses lashed on by a slashing and cracking whip. Three or four men were running beside it calling out directions to the driver. A woman screaming inside the caravan smashed out the glass window.

“Damn the little vixen,” one of the men growled.

"She's broke the glass, but she can't get out. The door's screwed up. Drive like blazes."

Without a moment's hesitation Jasper hurled himself at the horse's heads. He hung on by the harness, and forced them back. The caravan swayed to and fro, creaking and groaning, the wheels slithered about on the grass, and the driver sat helpless, not realizing what had happened.

"Hit him with the whipstock, Jim," one of the men below advised. Something heavier than a weighed whipstock thudded into his face, and he was knocked clean off his feet. Bendigo guarded a blow from a bludgeon, but it numbed his arm, and although the force of the blow was broken, it partly reached him, and set his head singing like a fiddle. He dropped the man who had struck him with his right, and sent him to grass, where he rolled about bewailing a broken jaw.

As he squirmed about, one of the caravan wheels went over his foot, and forgetting his broken jaw, he staggered to his feet cursing and moaning. It would be more in keeping with the fact to say that he staggered to one foot, for the poor lame devil dragged the other after him, and blaspheming at every step, made his way across the moor towards the few remaining lights of Doncaster. His predicament frightened the other ruffians. The caravan had been brought to a standstill, the driver had dropped off, and however many of them there were they all took to their heels. Cherry Ribbons was at the broken window screaming out that they had killed the Tinman. "They all set upon him and I could not get out to help," she said to Jasper. "Where's Blue Birdseye? Is he with you?"

As Bendigo came up to the window they heard the Tinman's wife crying hysterically—"Oh, my God,

daughter, they've murdered your father! They've killed him!"

"We'll search for him if you'll give us a light," Jasper said. Cherry Ribbons passed them a lantern through the broken window, leaving the caravan in darkness. Jasper turned the horses and led them back on the old wheel-tracks, Bendigo carrying the lantern. Presently the Tinman came staggering towards them. He had been bludgeoned and left unconscious on the ground, but his scattered senses had returned to him as he saw the moving light. "Who's put the horses in?" he asked.

"That swell gorgio, Buck Castleton," Jasper growled in the Romany.

"A fine dance on the heath Zillah's fortune telling has led to."

"Can I help the swell gorgio having wine in his head, and gold in his pocket, and hell in his heart?" Zillah called from the caravan. "Undo the door and let us out on the heath."

"Turn those nags loose on the moor," the Tinman said. "Our horse is pegged up against the tent."

Jasper took the nags out of harness and the Tinman cut at them with his whip. As they plunged across the moor he went to the caravan door and found it had been screwed up from the outside. Jasper said he would soon have the screws out with a knife and Bendigo held the lantern for him. His head throbbed where the bludgeon had struck him. The lantern suddenly turned the color of blood, and, with the red glare in his eyes, Bendy collapsed in the grass against the caravan.

Jasper had drawn two of the screws out, and was working on the last one when Bendy and the lantern went down together.

"What's the matter with him?" Jasper asked anxiously. The Tinman seized the lantern, which had canted on its side, and held it to Bendy's face.

"He's been hit on the head with something. His hair is soaked with blood."

Cherry Ribbons must have heard this, for, with a cry of distress, she rushed at the caravan door and broke it open. She knelt beside Bendigo, and saw that he had been struck on the side of the head by a heavy stick or stone. She bathed the injured head, plastered it over with gypsy ointment, and bandaged it with his own belcher handkerchief. She sat on the grass beside him, watching him by the lantern light, and crooning some outland spell that sounded half like a lament for the dead and half like a child's lullaby.

"This gorgio has travelled far for a pair of bright eyes and a brown face since I set the snare of the heath upon him," she said in Romany.

"A woman is always either setting snares or falling into them," Jasper said bitterly.

"Beware of making a halter of a true love knot, daughter," warned the Tinman's wife.

Cherry Ribbons laughed, but it was a queer jangled laugh that had neither music nor merriment in it.

"There is a man's way with women, and a woman's way with men. Buck Castleton would have made a pretty toy of me, mother."

"This man lies in his blood for you, daughter."

"His own blue birdseye is the best plaster for that crack on the head. Tie a young man's head up in love and dreams and it will soon mend."

"The wench speaks of a man's head as if it was a kettle," said the Tinman's wife impatiently.

"So it is," laughed Zillah, "a singing kettle for the solder of sleep to mend. If he has done this for a flash

of dark eyes and a kiss of a gypsy lips, has he not been well repaid? He had the joy of a fight on the heath, and he milled two or three of them."

The Tinman put the lantern to Bendigo's face. "He has had the senses knocked out of his head."

"Ay, but not the dreams," said Zillah. "They are flying about the light like moths."

"Daughter, thou hast the heart of a jade," said the Tinman's wife.

"He will recover?" Jasper asked earnestly.

"Ay, and be none the worse in the morning but for a headache."

"Then I will go back to Eckersley's booth fox-foot and fetch the fiddle."

As Jasper went off in the darkness the Tinman put their horse into the shafts and Zillah occupied herself in tying and re-tying an orange silk handkerchief in a true lover's knot around Bendigo's neck. Presently Jasper came back with the fiddle under his arm. They grouped themselves once more around Bendigo and put the lantern on his face.

"He will come to no harm here," said the Tinman.

"If I thought he would I'd sit beside him and fiddle all the night," said Jasper.

"Come!" said the Tinman, giving his whip a crack. The horse strained, the harness creaked, and the caravan moved on. Cherry Ribbons kissed Bendigo's lips and eyes.

"Dream of me, Blue Birdseye," she whispered. "Dream of your true love."

Then she stole away and very soon they were winding along a dark lane, leaving the lights of Doncaster behind.

CHAPTER XVIII

FIDDLE AND FISTS

A YOUNG man with a dew-drenched birdseye around his aching head awoke amidst the green and gold of Doncaster Moor next morning. From the empty heath a lark flew singing into the sky and Bendigo followed its flight in some bewilderment.

He found something soft clinging to his neck—that was her orange silk favor, he felt something wild tingling in his face—that was her kiss. He looked this way and that for the Tinman's van, but all that he found was its old camping place shown by trampled heath and ashes and the ruts of wheels. Zillah and her people had departed. Once more the heath, the country roads, and the green lanes had come between them, and there was no knowing when, if ever, they would meet again.

As gypsyish as the thorny briar that carries wild roses, or the cruel gorse that gleams in gold, she had left him lying on the heath under the stars. But the dew of the morning was not fresher on his face than the kiss she had left lingering there. He lingered also about the old camping ground with thoughts as gray as the ashes of the gypsy fire in his mind. Of the youth and warmth and color and freshness and beauty of Cherry Ribbons, nothing was left him but gray ashes now.

But at the turn in every lane he would be hoping and longing to meet her. For truth to tell, Cherry Ribbons was mixed up with his newly awakened joy in the beauty and wonder of the countryside. Some discerning poet has called Time a gypsy man; it remains

for another equally discerning poet to call Nature a gypsy woman.

The boxing booth was packed up and ready to take the road when Bendigo returned. Mr. Gully had made him a present of five sovereigns, and he dazzled his pugilistic friends by flashing Lord Lavender's snuff-box out of a pocket of his moleskin waistcoat. Levi Eckersley wanted to buy it from him, but if Bendy had no nose for snuff, he had an eye for encrusted diamonds, and also a memory for old friends. He told Eckersley that he did not intend to sell it, whatever was offered. The Duke of Limbs had been a good friend to him and he meant to present him with Lord Lavender's jewelled snuff-box on returning to Nottingham.

Jasper must have returned to the boxing booth and fetched his fiddle away, for it was gone when Levi Eckersley looked about for it. "It's not likely Gypsy will turn up again," he grumbled, "and here we are left without a fiddler. I can't understand how you both came to go off in the night like that. I heard nothing. I was fast asleep."

"It's lucky you were," Bendigo said. "It may have saved you from getting a clout on the head with a stick like I did."

In those days fiddling and fighting often went together, and they were fortunate enough to meet a young Jew tramping from Doncaster who had lost his money at the races and could scrape a few tunes out of a fiddle well enough for the show front. He was clever with his hands, too, and Eckersley had to put a patch of sticking-plaster on his nose after giving him a trial with the gloves.

"What's your name?" he asked, fishing his snuff-box out and toying with a thumbful of top-mill.

"Izzy Lazarus," said the Jew, hunching himself

up over the old fiddle, which was no more swarthy of feature than he was. Eckersley's snuff ran to waste through outspread fingers.

"Why the devil didn't you say so before?" he snapped, finding that he had been sparring with a pet of Petticoat Lane."

"I applied for a job as a fiddler, not as a boxer."

"They go together in this booth, and if you can fake the bosh as well as you've faked my smeller, you'll do," Eckersley growled.

Izzy Lazarus put none of Jasper's gypsyish spell on the fiddle, but he soon showed himself to be a quick and tricky boxer. Even his Yiddish gestures were a cover-up, and he played the fiddle as if he had got in chancery, fibbing at it with a punishing right until the lacerated catgut squeaked and squealed.

One day at a Yorkshire fair a burly-looking fellow with a bruised face and a young man who wore a spotted yellow neckerchief over a smock frock were conspicuous among the crowd attracted by Izzy's squeaking fiddle. Eckersley was more cautious than usual in his preliminary guff.

"There's two of the milling coves looking on," he said to Bendigo. "They don't think I'm fly to 'em, but I've had my ogles on 'em all the time. That young covey with the yellow belcher round his squeeze is Tom Scrutton, the Yorkshire champion. He's going in training to fight Brassey, of Bradford, and I'll bet the other man's his trainer. They're up to something. We'll see which way the cat jumps."

"Which is Bendigo?" asked the stiff-built man who had the beetling brows and hard-cut countenance of an old bruiser.

"Well, blow my buttons! I've been introducing him at every performance till I thought everybody

knew him," Eckersley said affably. "This young man with the blue birdseye is Bendigo, and he's ready to put on the mittens with cat or kittens. Will you step in for a round or two?"

"I shouldn't mind, but I'd sooner back Joe Noakes against him at wrestling. He's the best chap in our village at wrestling, is young Joe Noakes."

The young fellow with the yellow fogle grinned like a yokel in a bean field.

"If he'll come over and try a fall on the village green I'll throw him best two out of three."

"My lad, we're not playing at buttercups and daisies. This is Levi Eckersley's boxing booth, and if I look anything like the village green it's not my fault. Pay your threepence and step inside, and if you can go three rounds with the man who puts the gloves on against you, I'll hand you a couple of yellow boys over the ropes and one in for luck. I can't say fairer than three golden sovereigns for threepence, can I gents?"

"I'll have a go at him," grinned the yokel in the smock frock, on which Eckersley's mouth clicked like a mouse-trap.

"That's all right, my lad. Come inside and have 'em on with Izzy Lazarus, the fiddler. If he loses, Izzy will pay you two pounds out of his own pocket and I'll add a third."

Izzy ceased playing with a jerk that broke a string and the snap of it seemed to loosen his lower jaw, for his Jewish face looked as dark and long as the fiddle.

Smock Frock gaped and Bendigo grinned. Then Izzy saw it was a joke and went on fiddling with three strings.

"We didn't come here to box Petticoat Lane," the bruiser said from the thick of the crowd, showing

an inside knowledge of the ring that made Eckersley smile.

"I know that, my hearty. You came to try the fly yokel dodge on the wrong man. If Tom Scrutton, the Yorkshire champion, wants to box Bendigo let him put up a side-stake and I'll think about it."

The young Yorkshireman laughed.

"I'm Tom Scrutton," he admitted, "but I'm afraid neither me nor my trainer can put up much of a side-stake."

"Tom's backer was broke at Doncaster races, and we've got to find another by the end of the month or forfeit to Brassey," the stiff-built man explained. "Tom and me are footing it to Sheffield, taking on any cove as likes to put 'em up for our bread and cheese. We heard first of all that you wanted a fiddler, but you'd got one on the front when we arrived."

"Can Tom Scrutton fiddle?" Eckersley asked.

"No, but I can," the stiff-built covey said.

"There's room for two crowdsmen on the show front, so tune up, my hearty."

Izzy reluctantly handed over his fiddle to the newcomer who complained that a string was broken.

"Play a tune that goes to three strings, then, like a fly cove," Eckersley suggested. Tom Scrutton's trainer soon satisfied Levi as to his musical abilities. "You and Izzy can have it out which of you is the worst fiddler," he growled. Eckersley still wore sticking-plaster on his nose where Izzy Lazarus had split it, and personally he was rather aggrieved that the pet of Petticoat Lane had not been able to earmark Bendigo. In a flash of showman's wit he announced: "The two fiddlers will fiddle and fight inside the ring. Admission only threepence a nob. They can fake a bosh or a boko. After a turn-up with the gloves in

which each will do his best to rosin the other's mug, they will tease the catgut, scrape the bosh, or fake the fiddle. Each of the two fiddles used in this booth is an original Stride—over—us, otherwise a Strad, made from the genuine catgut out of the Kilkenny cats. So walk up and no waiting."

There was a rush into the booth, and the pet of Petticoat Lane certainly filled his part of the programme by fiddling the stiff covey all over the ring. But he was game enough, and, like good Halifax cloth, wore well after milling. The upshot of it was that Eckersley engaged Tom Scrutton and his trainer to travel with the show on fiddler's fare, which he described as "meat, drink, lush-money, and lodging."

"I was told at Doncaster there's not a man on the moors can beat Tom Scrutton at wrestling," Eckersley said to Bendigo.

"He's grassed all comers so far, but candidly I think his colors will be lowered by Young Brassey, the Bradford lad."

Tom Scrutton proved a hefty chap, an upstanding slugger in style, who soon found he had a lot to learn in ringcraft from the ducking and dodging Bendigo. And with the green turf for a mat, Bendy learned from him the secret of many a north-country fall, chip, and throw. When they arrived at Sheffield, discriminating sportsmen soon spotted the young man with the blue birdseye was a cut above the other milling blades, and Eckersley tried to persuade him to stay on with the booth. But Bendigo was anxious to turn over the money he had in his pocket to his mother and Lord Lavender's snuff-box to the Duke.

So Izzy Lazarus and the stiff covey fiddled him to the stagecoach, and when he climbed on the box-seat whom should he be sitting beside but the cock-eyed

Coachman, who would insist upon paying for a quart of ale so that they could drink each other's health out of the same mug.

And there never was a more affable pair of companions on the top of a stagecoach than Handsome Harry, the coachman, and the passenger with a blue birdseye.

CHAPTER XIX

BENDIGO BECOMES A "MILLING BLADE"

"WHY, lad, you've come back a gentleman," Mrs. Thompson said, when Bendigo arrived with his valise from the Sheffield coach.

"I've come home wi' a new suit of clothes on my back and plenty of money in my pocket," Bendy said, throwing a handful of gold down on the table with a jingle.

Bendigo's mother found her wandering son's tale of adventure as full of interest as the chap-books she bought from old Jerry, the flying stationer; and Bendy had as many tales to tell, whilst his friends were blowing a cloud in the parlor of the Lion and Unicorn, as if he had been on a sea voyage.

When he told them he had had the gloves on with the Deaf 'Un, and John Gully had backed him to beat Burke with the raw 'uns, there was enthusiasm and excitement amongst Bendy's supporters. The Duke of Limbs poured out reminiscences of John Gully, his only grievance against him being that he had entered Parliament on the Chartist side.

"I'm True Blue to the core," he declared. "Confound the politics and knavish tricks of the Chartists. They're no friends of sport. But you must not say anything about Gully in Jack Ridsdale's hearing. The way he thrashed his brother, Bobby, in the hunting field has made Jack so thin-skinned he bristles up into a temper at mention of the old sportsman as if the riding-crop had fallen across his own shoulders."

"He must have laid it on thick, too," Bendy said. "I saw him throw a six-foot man across the room like

a skittle. 'There's your friend, Osbaldeston,' he said. 'Now you can pick him up.'"

"Egad! did he?" Joe Whitaker exclaimed. "I should have liked to see him do that. But if the man was a friend of Osbaldeston's, the Squire would call him out."

"He did, and they blazed away at each other. I saw it from behind some bushes. The Squire shot a hole through Gully's hat, and Lord Lavender stopped the duel. Here's a present for you, Duke. As it belonged to a nobleman, it ought to be kept among the aristocracy."

After examining the elegant snuff-box Bendigo had laid down on the table, Whitaker inquired, "How did you get such a natty snuff-box as that? Why, it's all a-glitter with diamonds."

"It was given me by Lord Lavender for knocking him off his pins. It's yours now, Duke."

"Then allow me to offer all my friends a pinch."

"Your servant, Duke," Bendy grinned, making a leg as he pushed his fingers in the snuff-box.

"Oh! egad! Why not?" smirked Sam Merriman, aping the swells. But he was outdone by his friend and rival, Bill Atkinson, the dandy snip, who set the room roaring by the mincing way in which he took a pinch of snuff and applied it to his "sneezer," drawling: "Oh, demn it all, Duke, you are going the pace. When you flash that with your gold tattler and silk wipe you'll be a regular out-and-outer."

He just avoided the Duke's fist which crashed through the panel of a partition into the next room with a signet ring gleaming on the middle finger.

The Duke was reading out the sporting news at the Lion and Unicorn, when his eyeglass suddenly stiffened.

"Begad, here's an account of a Yorkshire mill that will interest us all. Brassey met Tom Scrutton last Thursday, and the Yorkshire champion's colors were lowered by the Bradford lad in slashing style. Now the odd thing is I've had a letter by this morning's mail in which some well-known members of the Sheffield Fancy offer to back Bendy against Brassey if his Nottingham supporters will meet them and make arrangements."

After he had read out the letter, the Duke flashed his eyeglass round and asked: "What do you think of that, gentlemen?"

The landlord expanded like a pouter pigeon in a red waistcoat.

"Brassey is undoubtedly a good man," he said, "younger than Bendigo, but heavier and taller."

"Egad! how did he get his monicker?"

"By working at a brass foundry. His real name is John Leechman. I've seen him mill, and he's a young fellow who's a-coming on, as Sam Turner would say. I'm not denying that Brassey's a good lad, but in my opinion Bendy's a better."

"I hope so, with all respect to the Duke and you, Mr. Jephson," Bendigo said. "If you'll let me chuck my hat in the ring against the Bradford man, I'll beat him under an hour."

"Then you shall, my lad," the Duke declared. "We'll put the ropes round the grass instead of letting it grow under our feet."

"Why not go over to Sheffield to-day, then, and arrange things?" Mr. Jephson suggested. "I'll drive you over in my trap."

It was a fine morning and the Duke decided to accept the invitation. The sporting landlord was nothing loath to do the journey, as it provided a good excuse

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for the day off, and, getting rid of his apron, he presented himself in buckskins and top boots, a cutaway coat and a rakish white hat, as natty a whip as could be wished for with a frolicsome cob between the shafts of a trap that took four of them—the Duke, Bendigo, and Sam Merriman.

At the Golden Lion in Sheffield they met the sporting blades who had declared their willingness to back Bendigo against Brassey. Far from crying off, they said the pick of the Sheffield Fancy were satisfied that he was the lad for their money. So they all went across to the Stag's Head in Preston Street, which was kept by Jem Mapping, a pugilistic publican, who acted as Brassey's trainer and second. He was at the tap-board in shirt sleeves and apron, and he apologized for not receiving them in state as belonging to the distinguished fraternity of the P. R.

"When you keep a tap," he said, "you can't always be toffed up like a mail-coachman, but I'll join you in the parlor and we'll all be sociable together."

He had a challenge posted up over his tap-board to match Young Brassey for £25 to £50. He admitted, however, that £25 would suit him better than the larger sum.

The upshot of it was that the Duke called for quill, ink, and paper to draw up the articles. Before the ink was sanded Levi Eckersley and his fiddlers two came in, having heard that Bendigo was at the Stag's Head. Eckersley shook hands with the Duke, remarking wittily, as he thought, that he should be well acquainted with the aristocracy as he got a living by his "dukes."

Izzy Lazarus and the stiff covey wanted to fetch their fiddles from the booth, but the Duke said in Levi's ear that while an occasional fiddle was a feast, he for his

part soon had a sufficiency, and two fiddles were at least one too many.

"The Bradford lad is one of the best in the Midlands," Eckersley told the Duke. "Look how he milled Jem Bailey last Easter on Baildon Moor. I was Bailey's second, and after being in the ring with him I've got a lot of respect for Young Brassey. The fight lasted two hours and a quarter, and our man was fairly knocked out of time at the finish. I had to chew his ear to bring him round."

"I never expected Tom Scrutton to mill him, but I'd put my old silver tattler on Bendigo doing it."

"I tell you vat," Izzy Lazarus said confidentially. "If Bendy had been born with a hook nose and brought out by Old Dutch Sam he'd have been a credit to Petticoat Lane, an' I can't say no fairer."

"Egad! no, I should think not," said the Duke, flashing his snuff-box across the table.

CHAPTER XX

A SWEET BIT OF TURF

ON THE day preceding the fight, Bendy came over to Sheffield in the pink of condition, and put up at the Golden Lion, where his supporters mustered; whilst Brassey was to be met with at Jem Mappin's house, the Stag's Head.

The Midland Fancy began to arrive early next morning. Matt Robinson's Yorkshire "tykes" being first in the field. Harry Potter, the Tattersall of the North, who had backed Ben Caunt against Bendigo on Jack Ridsdale's advice, arrived on the scene with a racing contingent, just as stakes and ropes for the ring were being packed into a cart at the Stag's Head. His big white hat soon made itself prominent.

"Why, Jem," he said to Mappin, with a whimsical wink, "is there a mill on? Then I'm in luck. I always seem to kick up against stakes and ropes. Where is it to take place?"

"That's just what we want to settle, Mr. Potter. Within a hundred miles of Bradford, and as near to Sheffield as may be."

"Well, now, that's a devilish odd thing, but I noticed a sweet bit of turf in a nice, secluded spot on the old Manchester road as we came along."

"Whereabouts would that be now, Mr. Potter?" Mappin asked.

"At Deepcar, and if I had anything to do with it, I'd pitch the ring amongst the daisies there."

Harry Potter's advice was taken, and the cart with the material for the ring was at once dispatched along the old Manchester road. A number of ringkeepers

had been picked out from the ranks of old Midland pugilists to patrol the outer ring with sticks and whips, maintain order, and keep the ropes clear. Jem Mappin and George Thorpe looked after the interests of Brassey, whilst Sam Merriman and Sam Turner acted as Bendigo's seconds.

The Duke of Limbs and Mr. Jephson had spent the night at the Golden Lion, and in the morning they drove Bendy over to Deepcar, Merriman and Turner going in a trap ahead of them to make arrangements. A Newark sportsman acted as referee

There was some discussion about Bendy's colors, his blue and white spots not satisfying the Sheffielders, who wanted him to wear the color they had selected for him, a deep orange, in defiance of Brassey's burning red. He was stubborn for the blue belcher his mother had given him. Sam Turner pointed out that orange ribbons were being sold as his fighting color outside the ring, for a shilling each, or any money that they would fetch. But Bendigo regarded it as having been thrust upon him by his Sheffield backers. He disliked wearing anything but the old blue birdseye.

"They've got the yellow fogle at the stakes, Duke," he said.

"Then damme, I'll mix the birdseye with it," said the Duke. "There's wind enough for the two of them, and it's blowing our way."

The next minute the blue birdseye was mingled with the Sheffield Yellow-boy.

"All the Nottingham Fancy are wearing the birds-eye, my lad," the Duke said. And so Bendigo went into the ring with glossy gold at his garters and the birdseye at his belt. Was it destiny? For besides being Ben Caunt's old color, golden yellow was the hue of the handkerchief Cherry Ribbons had looped round

his neck when she left him lying under the stars on Doncaster Moor.

"Egad! There's the Tinman's fiddle," said the Duke at the ropes. The Fighting Tinman was fiddling on the other side of the ring, with a birdseye round his neck and a bit of yellow ribbon at the end of his fiddlestick.

Close to him was Jasper waving the birdseye on a cudgel, and between them was a slim gypsy lad with shining eyes and high color, who wore an orange neckerchief and fluttered a yellow ribbon bought at the ring-side. The young gypsy had cheeks like sunburned roses, and as the Duke flourished his hat to the Tinman the bronze roses burned deeper. But Bendigo had not sufficient acquaintance with romantic fiction to imagine that a gypsy lass might be inside the clothes of a gypsy lad, and that Zillah's abundance of glossy hair could be done up and imprisoned under an old game-stalker's cap.

There were three thousand people present at the ringside when the fight started. The clock of Deepcar village struck the hour of noon as they came to the scratch.

Trained to perfection by Jem Mapping, Brassey looked in good trim, and bore himself as if confident of victory. He tried to land a nobbler right off, but, avoiding the right which Brassey smashed at his face, Bendy nailed him on the nose with a stinging left which was too quick to watch.

On the color of Brassey's claret showing, his supporters looked gloomy, but a cheer went round the ring.

"First blood to Bendy!" cried his supporters, who made up two-thirds of the ringsiders.

Stopped by the blow, and more than a little surprised at the force of it, Brassey put his wresting abilities

into play. He dashed at his opponent and came to grips. The Yorkshire roar, so familiar on Doncaster race course after the St. Leger, now broke loose, but in this case it was premature. For instead of being cross-buttocked, Bendy back-heeled his man, and sent him flying backwards on the turf with ease and neatness. This ended the first round, amidst shouts from his supporters of "Bendy wins! Bendy wins!"

Harry Potter was betting 2 to 1 on Bendy's chance now, and holding his white hat out for the money, but very little was dropped in it.

The second round opened with a body blow from Brassey, which Bendy stopped neatly, dealing a smack between the eyes in return which knocked him back. Before he could recover himself, Brassey was knocked back again, and then again, with left and right, until he was staggering against the ropes. Finally he clutched Bendigo and tried to fib or pummel him at close quarters, but it was Bendy who did the fibbing. Nor could Brassey throw his man, for Bendy kept his legs, and when he went down he was top-dog.

In the third round Bendy was hit low and the breath punched out of his body with a hiss they could hear at the ropes, and Brassey thought that now was the time to give him a heavy fall that would shake the fight out of him. So he took a hold of Bendigo and Bendigo took a hold of him, and they saw Brassey thrown by one of the greatest cross-buttocks that ever brought a man to Yorkshire grass.

The Duke's ecstatic eye beamed behind his quizzing-glass

"Egad!" he said unctuously.

"Demned if he ain't stood him on his head!" chirped Bill Atkinson.

"So he has, an' done it handsomely," Sam Merri-man cooed from his corner.

Bendigo had now taken the measure of his man. He went at him with the strain and instinct of the fighting cock. To mill him! Over the trampled grass he kept moving up to him, round him, and away from him, the crowd at the ropes following every movement of both men with swivelled eyes. Time after time Bendigo drove his knuckles into the bone and flesh that was Brassey. The crack of the blows sounded round the ring. Bendigo judged their effect by the bite and tingle they left in his hands. Hard as they were, there was a peculiar sensitiveness about old-time prize fighters' hands that approached to the nervous fingers behind the chipping mallet of the sculptor, and the remodelling of human clay as it proceeded was caustically commented on by hundreds of critical connoisseurs.

Not having much to do with it, Sam Merriman squeezed the sponge spasmodically and Sam Turner cut a notch methodically in a bit of stick for every good blow Bendy got in. Before the fight was over the whittled stick looked as if he had been scorer for a cricket match.

The mob at the outer ring cheered and cursed and sagged at the ropes until the cracking whiplashes of the ringkeepers persuaded them to keep back, for the fight was conducted according to the regulations of the Pugilistical Club, which stipulated for a second run-round of ropes, or outer ring kept clear by professional ringkeepers provided with long whips.

In round after round Young Brassey was out-classed and outfought. He must have realized it himself. His supporters fell away, and some of the lowest order badgered him over the ropes calling him a cur and a knobstick. His seconds wanted to throw up the

sponge. Battered to a standstill, baited by the mob, and enraged at the advice given him in his corner, Brassey gave a bellow like a mad bullock, lowered his head, and butted Bendigo onto the ropes, losing the fight by what has been described in pugilistic records as "the most deliberate foul ever perpetrated in a twenty-four-foot ring," although one cannot help wondering what the size of the ring had to do with the iniquity of the offence.

There was immediate uproar, subdued by the cracking of whips and the shouting of those in authority. Then the verdict was given. Winded as he was, Bendigo heard himself proclaimed the victor, and, led by the jiggling of the Tinman's fiddle, his supporters cheered up and down the square of ropes.

The Sheffield and Nottingham Fancy coming from the fight made the road uproarious, and showered small silver on the toll-bar keepers; but the Bradford turnpikes knew it for a bad day. Brassey was taken back to the Druid's Arms wrapped up in a coachman's topcoat, which, considering the warmth of the day, must have been worn more for concealment than comfort. But Bendigo was driven back to the Golden Lion as fresh as a daisy. Once inside, it was clear that if they wished to return to Nottingham that day they would have to fight their way out. The Duke was so furious at first that Bendigo thought he meant to take his coat off and mow a way into the street, or out at the back. But he mellowed in the landlord's armchair over a bottle of port, whilst Bendigo was kept "bobbing" to the company.

So they stayed at the Golden Lion and before they started off next day the innkeeper handed Bendigo a letter which had been left for him, as he said, by a

young gypsy wench who had called early in the morning to see if they had any kettles or iron pots to mend.

Bendigo gave the letter to Joe Whitaker to read, and although the Duke would have excused himself from prying into a young woman's secrets, Bendy said his mother might have no such scruples if she saw the letter about, and it would be better for him to know its contents. So whilst Bendy took the reins, the Duke read Cherry Ribbon's letter through his quizzing-glass.

It was shamelessness itself, since she addressed Blue Birdseye as her true love, and said with pride that she had been at the ringside to see him fight Brassey.

"Egad, how can that be, when there was not a petticoat present?" asked Whitaker.

But as he read on, Zillah explained that she had been taken to see the fight dressed in male attire, the clothes she wore having belonged to her brother. At first she dreaded that her deception would be discovered, and was shy of mixing with the crowd round the ropes. But presently the excitement of the mill stirred her blood, and waving Bendigo's colors she shouted with the rest of his supporters, and backed him to win.

"She would not be any the poorer for doing that," said the Duke, "but this romantic gypsy sweetheart of yours has criss-crossed the pages to such an extent I can scarcely follow the quill. Stay, what have we here: 'That swell, Buck Castleton, has found me out, and sent a message to say that he will make a lady of me if I will come to him. I should like to go with a dogwhip, dressed as a man, and mark him as you did with your fists at Doncaster.'"

Bendy gritted his teeth. "Damn Buck Castleton,"

he growled. "When I get a chance to mill him again, I'll lam into him."

"The letter ends with a prodigal array of crosses, which she says are kisses from 'Cherry Ribbons' to her true sweetheart, 'Blue Birdseye'."

"I'd better tear it up," Bendy said stolidly.

"Tear your charmer's first love letter up?" asked the Duke in dismay. "Egad! we didn't do such things as that in the days when I went sweethearting."

"My mother will tear her up, if she reads it by any chance."

The Duke dropped his quizzing-glass, and chuckled. "Perhaps you're right, Bendy. In this particular case it might be an act of discretion to get rid of the letter."

So Bendy tore the letter into shreds, fragrant as rose leaves, and scattered them to the wind, and the wind bade fair to blow them across broad Yorkshire as it had done the ashes of the gypsy fire on Doncaster Moor.

When the Duke's gig arrived at Nottingham displaying the colors from the stakes, and drew up against Bendigo's mother, who stood amidst a group of the birdseyed Fancy, she demanded: "Who's been sucking oranges at Sheffield?"

"Well, you see, ma'am," quizzed the Duke, a little ill at ease, in spite of his raillery, "it was Lombard Street to a china orange against the other man from the first, and although we've not brought the Bank of England back, we've brought a good share of the brass that was out on Brassey."

He jingled some of it loosely in the pocket of his driving coat. But Bendigo's mother was not to be outwitted by such a stratagem.

"You've never turned a True Blue lad into an Orangeman, Duke?" she cried contemptuously.

"The Sheffield blades put the orange fogle up at the stakes, ma'am."

"I'd have torn it down, Duke."

"I know you would, ma'am, but I had to pursue a policy of conciliation, so I mixed the birdseye with it, and Bendigo wore the blue spots for a belt."

As Bendigo dropped from the step of the gig, and was being patted on the back by his admirers, his mother caught him a cuff on the side of the head. "What made you wear the Sheffield colors, lad?"

"I didn't know about it till I was in the ring."

Bendigo's mother looked at him with piteous eyes. His face was burning red like Brassey's fogle, and she thought her angry hand had done it.

"I thought there was a lily-white wench in it, lad, and I lost my temper. Abednego, my son, I've hurt thee more than Brassey did."

"It's nowt, mother. I'm used to blows."

"Ay, lad, but not from the hands that brought thee up."

And drawing him to her by the fluttering ends of his blue birdseye, Bendigo's mother kissed him.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DUKE SUSPECTS TRICKERY

A MILLING cove with a grievance sat with his nose out of joint over a mug of beer at the Lion and Unicorn. The disconsolate bruiser appeared by the condition he was in to have had a dreadful milling.

"A swell cavalry officer at the barracks has done it," Mr. Jephson explained to the Duke. "He must be an out-and-outer with the gloves. Three good men I've sent to spar with him have all come back with their faces knocked out of shape. He's making a laughingstock of the Fancy. Says we haven't got a man worth a damn in the town. I wish Bendy would take him on and teach him a lesson."

The injured man nursed his side, wincing and groaning with pain. The muscles of the Duke's face contracted round his eyeglass in a frown that threatened to shatter it.

"It seems to me that you've sustained a broken rib or two."

"He smashed in three or four rib-benders that made me feel sick." A twinge of pain turned the man cold and sallow.

"I'll drive you to a doctor," the Duke said. "I'm pretty sure you're suffering from fractured ribs, and you'll want medical attention sooner or later."

Joe Whitaker returned looking grim and serious. "That poor devil had a couple of broken ribs as I thought," he said. "He's spitting blood, and has been badly hurt. The doctor says he can plaster him up, but all the same this a black business. I've only known

one other occasion on which a man wearing mufflers broke another man's ribs. That was when Molyneux, the black, sparred with Captain Barclay, at Gentleman Jackson's rooms in Bond Street. Now Barclay was the best man in England with his feet—he walked a thousand miles without fatigue—and he liked to be thought to be the best amateur with his hands. But some good men visited Jackson's rooms, and Barclay knew it. So he had a special pair of gloves made with unpadded knuckles, and egad! I've felt the weight of 'em many a time when I was in the Guards. Barclay basted us unmercifully, whilst we could do little or no damage to him with stuffed daddles. But at length the secret was found out by accident, and when Bill Richmond brought Molyneux round to spar with the captain, we were there before Barclay arrived, and saw to it that the blackamoor was provided with the unpadded gloves.

"Barclay could not cry off in the presence of Gentleman Jackson, who knew nothing of the affair, or at least gave that impression. The first body blow the heavy-handed blackamoor got home broke one of Barclay's ribs, and he had to give up the contest. He hated Molyneux like poison afterwards, and trained Tom Cribb to perfection for his second mill, when he beat the black. What I am coming to is this: I am of the opinion that someone is repeating Captain Barclay's trick, and using a special pair of unpadded gloves in the ring at the cavalry barracks."

The Duke of Limbs was too good a sportsman for suspicion to enter his mind without its being well grounded. Boxing gloves only partially padded are more disabling in their effects than the raw knuckles, for, although the concussion is deadened somewhat,

the knuckles bite in more deeply. The force of the blow is intensified and the punishment aggravated.

Joe Whitaker undertook to demonstrate this to anyone's satisfaction by cutting the "pudding" out of a pair of old gloves and having them on.

"I'd sooner argue with the swell at the barracks about it," said Bendigo.

"So you shall, Bendy," Mr. Jephson promised. "The Duke has found out his trick. It's the un-padded gloves he's been using that broke the noses and bent the ribs of the four good lads I sent to spar at the barracks. This buck is giving them good sport at the expense of the Fancy. But the next time he asks for a good man to spar with I'll send you to the barracks."

"Egad! I'll drive him over," said Joe Whitaker, rubbing his eyeglass on the birdseye. "I called in at the Flying Horse for a refresher after taking your man home and seeing him comfortable. Some young cavalry officers jingled in and, nettled at what had happened, I introduced myself. When I was a young man, the young men in the Guards were devilish fine fellows, let me tell you, and the dare-devil of the lot was Jack Pemberton—*bon sabreur* and good companion. He went out with many another good man in a blaze of glory at Waterloo."

Thereupon the Duke stood up stiffly silent and drained his glass of wine amidst the responsive silence of those who knew his whims, snapping his lips wryly as was his habit at the end of such a lapse, before he resumed the thread of his discourse.

"One of the young cavalymen at the Flying Horse turned out to be the son of Jack Pemberton, and as much like his father as the spur on one heel to its fellow on the other. So we had it over about the affair at the cavalry barracks, and I've got a surprise for you,

Bendy, my lad. The man who is doing all the damage came with their troop from York whilst you were away training for Brassey. He is cracked up as a Corinthian out-and-outer. He drove a mail-coach on the Yorkshire road for a hundred guineas against the pet of the regular coachmen and beat him. He is said to have learned all Deaf Burke can teach him with the gloves, and to have stood up to Young Dutch Sam without taking a milling."

"What's his name, Duke?" Bendigo asked, instinctively on the alert.

"His name, my lad, is Buck Castleton, the gentleman, I think you said, who saw the Sellinger Cup run for through a coach window and out of a pair of black ogles. The gentleman, I think you said, John Gully played at ninepins with at Doncaster, and a gentleman I believe you would like to meet again."

"I'd sooner meet him than Deaf Burke for the belt, Duke."

"Well, either he or some of his friends are in the fly that has just rattled up to the door."

Mr. Jephson was already in a flutter. "Some military swells from the barracks are asking for you, Duke."

"Egad! then show them into your sporting crib and honor the occasion with a few bottles of Waterloo port."

Fine, full-blooded stuff, that port of '15; taken out of the deepest corner of the rock cellar underneath, it gushed into the light it had not seen for many years with a rich sparkle. The Duke preceded it into the sporting parlor as fine and full-blooded as the port. A man of the Waterloo vintage, too. Young Jack Pemberton introduced him with a flash of pride in his soldierly eyes, bright and blue as a sabre.

"Oh, I say, Sinclair, here's Joe Whitaker, a friend of my father, and an old Guardsman."

"Late of the Third Guards, sir," said Whitaker, bowing.

"The Duke of Limbs, you know, and he thinks there's a man in the town who could mill Castleton."

The barrack-master knew Joe Whitaker's reputation, and he was soon discussing the matter with him. "Send your man by all means," he said, "but I warn you that Castleton is an out-and-outer. His last two opponents had to be carried out of the ring. He's a punishing hitter, and he gruels his man unmercifully."

"Egad! I've heard about it," the Duke said ironically.

"But the fellow is a dashed fine boxer," Jack Pemberton cut in. "I've had the gloves on with him, and I must admit he gave me a doing down. Besides, he has certainly put the noses of your local pugs out of joint."

The Duke did not enter into any dispute. His object was to carry his point.

"I've got a man inches shorter and stones lighter whom I am ready to back against Buck Castleton any day or night of the week. But I ought to tell you that the man I have in mind is a pet of the Fancy and may be a cut above Castleton."

"You really have no idea how good Castleton is with the gloves. I don't think anybody but Jem Ward or Deaf Burke could rattle him. But if you are in the mind for it we should be delighted to let your man have a turn-up with him in the gymnasium," said Captain Sinclair.

"You wish it to be with gloves?" the Duke flashed.

"Oh begad yes! I couldn't countenance a mill at the barracks."

"Very well. I propose to bring him over myself, on condition that I see the match from the ringside."

The barrack-master turned to the officers who had been listening to the conversation.

"Gentlemen, I presume Mr. Whitaker's condition is acceptable to you?" They hastened to say that they would be honored to have the Duke of Limbs among them, and answered for Buck Castleton's being agreeable to meet any man put up against him.

Arrangements were made over the Waterloo port, the Duke putting the wine-glasses he emptied one by one on the shelf against his elbow, as was his custom. When the shelf was full, he declared that he had drunk a sufficiency. "So that I may continue to appreciate the flavor of an excellent wine as I grow older, gentlemen," he said, "I never drink more than moderately."

He indicated the row of wine-glasses in confirmation of this sober habit. As the best tippler in the company was half a dozen glasses in arrear, they expected the Duke to be mellow.

But he was as firm on his legs as an oak table.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW BUCK CASTLETON CAME INTO A FORTUNE

THE blue birdseye for a stock and his bushy side-whiskers bristling like the bayonets of the old Guards, the Duke drove up to the cavalry barracks in his yellow gig. Bendigo was sitting beside him spruced up for the occasion, and he grinned cheerfully at the Duke's final admonishment: "You will strip to the buff, my lad, as if you were in the prize ring, and let him land on the brisket so that I can see whether he knuckles you, or not. Egad! though, don't let him hit you too hard."

"I'll see to it, Duke. I shall want all my ribs to spread out this sprigged waistcoat you've given me."

As they entered the yard a couple of "swaddies" carrying buckets of water into the stables called out the barrack sergeant. That functionary jingled up, groomed to perfection, evidently prepared for their coming, and told some of the troopers to put up the horse and gig whilst he fetched Captain Sinclair. The barrack-master did not seem impressed with Bendigo's chance against Buck Castleton.

"I thought he would be a bigger man," he admitted.

"Egad! he was big enough for Ben Caunt, so I think he will be for Buck Castleton," said the Duke.

Captain Sinclair had apparently never heard of the Hucknall man, for he made no further comment.

The gymnasium was full of officers in undress uniform. A few of the non-coms had been invited, but there were none of the ordinary troopers present, although they knew what was in the wind, and were betting on the result in the barrack yard.

When Buck Castleton recognized Bendigo he glared, and a dull flush showed on his cheekbone, which still bore a scar from Bendy's bony knuckles to remind him of their encounter at Doncaster. The Duke had his quizzing-glass on him, and was watching every move. If Castleton objected to Bendigo as a professional prize fighter, there might be no fight. But, in that case, Joe Whitaker meant to call him out before them all, notwithstanding Captain Sinclair's presence, and either brand him as a coward, or force a meeting. Whitaker was never a man for half measures, and he had given Bendy instructions, if he discovered the gloves were unpadded, to thrash his man unmercifully. Bendy did not need much incitement to such a course, since behind Buck Castleton he pictured the pretty but vindictive face of Cherry Ribbons, her dark eyes flashing, and her red lips urging him to give Castleton the milling he deserved.

The cavalry buck made no complaint. There was grim exultation in his manner. His aspect was that of a card-sharper who knows he must win, there being no element of chance in the game as he plays it. When Bendy was helped on with his gloves, he stared hard at them. They were the ordinary mufflers of the period, made of hard leather, stuffed thickly with horsehair. But Castleton's gloves looked smaller and more compact. The Duke of Limbs noticed the same point of interest, and his face wrinkled in gray ridges round his quizzing-glass, whilst his huge whiskers bristled.

Bendigo's crouching position dwarfed him beside Buck Castleton, who was over six feet. Bendy always fought with his right foot foremost and left shoulder hunched up. He could make a shift from one foot to the other with lightning speed, however. Castleton

swung savagely at his head and ribs time after time, but Bendy evaded the blows, and put in some stingers that made the buck wince. As he turned one blow by dropping his arm, Bendy let the back of Castleton's glove land on. The consequence was, as he was stripped to the buff, his skin showed the angry, sullen, and clearly distinct mark of knuckles. By turning with his arm thrown up Bendy displayed this to the Duke of Limbs. The Duke's eyeglass glared, and an oath slipped between his teeth. This was how the poor devil of a bruiser he had conveyed to the doctor's had sustained his broken ribs.

Bendigo now set about his man, and punished him severely with smashes to the face and body that split some of the stitches of the gloves. Buck Castleton was soon in a pitiable condition, one of his eyes being blacked and the claret flowing freely.

"You're beaten, Castleton. Give it up," some of his friends advised.

"This fellow is a well-known prize fighter named Bendigo," Castleton groaned. "He boxed Deaf Burke on Doncaster race course, and has been brought here to take a rise out of me."

"You knew well enough who he was when you put the gloves on with him," the Duke of Limbs replied from the ringside. "I happen to be Bendigo's backer, and a supporter of the Nottingham Fancy. The last of our men to box in this ring is under medical attention with a couple of broken ribs. Don't smuggle those gloves off your hands. I want Captain Sinclair to inspect them."

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" Castleton growled, his bruised face turning red as a turkey-cock's comb.

"That your gloves are not properly padded, but

are in the same condition as the pair with which Tom Molyneux broke one of Captain Barclay's ribs in Gentleman Jackson's sparring rooms."

There was an angry murmur among the officers, who held a hurried consultation as to which of them should take precedence in calling Joe Whitaker out.

Castleton dropped the gloves behind him, but Jack Pemberton pounced upon them, picked them up, and examined them.

"By Gad, sir, you're right," he called out to the Duke. "This man is a disgrace to the regiment, and I throw it in his teeth, here, now, and before you all. The padding has been cut out of these gloves in a double strip across the knuckles."

Buck Castleton made a savage rush for the young officer. But Jack Pemberton adopted Bendigo's tactics, and adroitly ducked under the blow aimed at him. Then he stepped in, and sending his fist crashing to Castleton's jaw, knocked him clean off his feet. The six-foot buck lay writhing on the boards, but nobody paid any attention to him. Captain Sinclair examined the gloves, then handed them around to the other officers for inspection.

"If Castleton is still in a condition to hear what I have to advise," he said with grim irony, "I should recommend him either to send in his papers, or to exchange into another regiment."

Badly punished by Bendigo's hard hitting, and knocked down by a subaltern as an additional indignity, Buck Castleton was helped out of the ring. He had been openly denounced as a trickster, and his brother officers turned their backs upon his exit.

His first care on reaching his quarters was to examine his face in a glass. It was cut, swollen, and discolored, one eye being blackened and nearly closed.

The cut on his left cheekbone, opening an old scar left by Bendigo at Doncaster, he owed to Jack Pemberton. He cursed the meddlesome young fool. They would expect him to challenge Pemberton now, and force their attentions on him, one after the other. But if he had to send in his papers, things could not be any worse.

There was a sharp knock on the door. Not knowing what to expect, Castleton jumped to a drawer, opened it, and pulled out a loaded pistol. Holding this behind him, he went across to the door, and asked, as coolly as he could, who was there.

"The orderly sergeant, sir. The London mail has just come in, and there are two letters for you."

Relieved but ruffled, Castleton took the letters with muttered thanks, and the sharp-eyed orderly sergeant wondered what the deuce he was going to do with that pistol. He confided his suspicions to one of the officers, who mentioned the matter casually to some of the others. Two to one was immediately offered that Castleton wouldn't have pluck to do it. There were no takers, however, and although one or two stood listening for the shot, the others moved away with ironic laughter.

Castleton stood by the window squinting at the letters. One of them was obviously a legal communication, and he threw that aside. Fortunately it was prepaid, so he was nothing out of pocket. He opened the wafer of the other letter, and with some difficulty deciphered it, for the gruelling he had received had turned the light thick and unsteady. It was from one of the young bloods he had taken up with at Doncaster, who was going the pace now in London with such fashionable sporting sparks as Lord Longford, Lord Caledon, and the Marquis of Waterford. The letter was written from Tom Spring's parlor, the

Castle Tavern, Holborn. "But old Tom Spring will soon be in the winter of his discontent as well as in the sere, the yellow leaf," wrote Castleton's correspondent, "for the sporting blades and milling coves are alike ready to patronize Jem Burn's new London sparring rooms, which promise to become as flash and fashionable as anything of the kind since Gentleman Jackson opened his Bond Street saloon. Why don't you sell out of the army, Castleton, and come and join the new order of Corinthians? What we want is a gentleman boxer to take the place of Jackson, and, if I may say so without offending you, your skill with the gloves, your good looks, your handsome figure, and polish of manner single you out as the natural arbiter of elegance in the new order of things."

Buck Castleton's bloodshot eyes caught a reflection of himself in the looking glass opposite, and he cursed both his looks and the letter. Gambling and horse racing had broke him. He had scarcely enough money left to see him to London, let alone set up an establishment there. If he sold out of the army what was he to do? He picked the legal communication up furiously and tore it open. It came from a Chancery Lane firm of lawyers, and Castleton's restricted vision suddenly converged upon it.

"Why, what the devil's this?" he gasped. He made out the name of an eccentric old uncle, an East Indian merchant, with offices in Mincing Lane, and suddenly grasped the meaning of the legal document. His eccentric old relation, with offices in Mincing Lane, was now deceased, and he had left a will in his favor. Buck Castleton had come in for a fortune, and all he had to do was to travel to town, call at a lawyer's office in Chancery Lane, affix his signature, and draw the money. As he realized this fact, he heard the pop of a

champagne cork. The officers messroom was underneath. They were toasting the Duke and Bendigo in a magnum of fizz. Castleton bit his lip. But after all, what did it matter? Within a few days he would be able to swim in champagne at Charley Wright's in the Haymarket. He would lure the comely gypsy charmer to him now with the flash of jewels; he would load her brown skin with jewels until she flashed scorn at Blue Birdseye. Buck Castleton's hour was coming. He would find a man to mill Bendigo and smash him up for this day's work, and for that day's work at Doncaster.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DUKE POLISHES HIS PISTOLS

WHEN Bendigo walked over to Ramsdale House, which stood on a hill of gorse and heather with a skyline that took in half of the next county, he found the Duke hissing like a groom over his pistols, which were speckless and shining. He was putting extra burnish on the silver plating in preparation for the inevitable meeting with Buck Castleton.

"What are you going to do with them, Squire?" Bendigo asked, giving Joe Whitaker his country title, with a pull of the forelock.

"Egad! Pop one of 'em, or both of 'em off at Captain Castleton when we have our appointment. I'm expecting his seconds any hour, or minute, my lad. This cavalry buck is a blackguard, and in Regency days I would have made mutton of him without compunction. But the laws are all against you killing your man in a duel nowadays, and I shall have to be satisfied with winging him. Even then, if the magistrates get wind of the affair, I may be apprehended. I have provided for any contingency. In case I am fatally hit, I shall have an accommodating medico at hand who will testify that I had a seizure and was removed to my home in a dying condition."

"He'll never fight you, Duke," Bendigo said bluntly.

The Duke of Limbs dropped his chamois leather in amazement and started back as if dumbfounded at the mere suggestion that Castleton would refuse to send him a challenge.

"You think Buck Castleton a coward, then?" he snapped.

"He's not the man to face you wi' a loaded pistol in your hand, anyhow, Duke."

"We shall see. But for my part—why I believe they are at the door now."

Whitaker's man announced:

"Two officers from the Nottingham barracks, sir."

"Show them in," Whitaker said, grimly. "You were wrong, my lad. Here are the bearers of the cartel."

But Bendy proved to be right. For when Lieutenant Jack Pemberton and a friend entered the room with the clank of spurs and a military flourish in answer to the Duke's bow, they announced that Captain Castleton, having resigned his commission, was now no longer wearing his Majesty's uniform, and, therefore, he could not under the circumstances, and that being the case, offer the Duke the entire satisfaction which he had unquestionably a right to demand and therefore—— Helping one another out with a stammer the two young officers came to a halt in confusion. They might have been facing a drumhead court-martial instead of an elderly gentleman with a rag of chamois leather in his hand.

They apologetically pointed out that the Duke was now entitled to call out a representative of the regiment. Finally curly-headed Jack Pemberton stood forward flushed and shame-faced.

"Oh, dash it all, Mr. Whitaker—as one of the old Guards, you'll understand how raw we feel about what has happened. Not to beat about the bush I'm here in Castleton's place, if you'll accept me, and I've brought a friend to arrange matters between us."

"I'm to meet you, then, instead of Castleton?" said the Duke.

Jack Pemberton bowed. "I shall be honored."

"What sort of a shot are you? As good as your father was?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. Only passable. We do not practise shooting at the wafer nowadays."

The Duke stuck a bottle of champagne with a tinsel cork up on the oak sideboard, and handed one of his pistols to the young officer.

"Come over here, Jack Pemberton's son. Now let me see you hit that cork."

The young Hussar fired and missed, his bullet going into the oak two inches wide of the mark. The pistol in the Duke's hand cracked out, and the bottle cracked too, the gold cork flying up in the air.

The Duke took glasses from the sideboard and picking up the bottle with the champagne frothing from the top, filled them one after the other.

"Here's to his Majesty's service," he said. "As an officer of the old Guards, allow me to clink glasses with you young gentlemen of the Hussars."

Their glasses jingled, and having emptied his, the Duke sent it crashing to the floor, where it smashed into glittering fragments.

"And there's to Buck Castleton and such men as he is," he said grimly.

Bendigo caught Jack Pemberton's eye.

"I wouldn't break any more glasses on him, sir."

"Begad! no! he isn't worth it," laughed the young Hussar. "If you'll fill 'em up again we'll drink to the Duke of Limbs."

"And I to the lad with the blue birdseye," said the Duke putting his pistols away in a cabinet.

When the Duke paid his next visit to the Lion and Unicorn there was a further flutter amongst the Fancy.

"Bendigo was just about to set off to you at Ramsdale with a letter I've received," Mr. Jephson said. "It came addressed to him and I opened it, but I'll fetch it for you to read yourself."

As the flurried landlord went in search of the letter which he had misplaced in his confusion, Sam Merri-man said, "They want Bendy to go to London."

"Egad! who wants him?" the Duke asked, his bulky figure spread in the doorway.

"The Gentlemen's Sparring Club which Jem Burn has started at the Queen's Head in the Haymarket."

"Tom Cribb's or Tom Spring's is more my house when I am in town," said the Duke, "although, mind you, I've nothing against Jem Burn. I remember old Ben Burn boasting about his nephew from Newcastle when Jem first came to the Rising Sun in Air Street. Begad, it was more the rising nephew then! Jem's a civil, gentlemanly fellow, and a good fighter."

"What do you say then, Duke, to Bendigo going to spar for him at the Gentleman's Sparring Club?"

"Does Jem Burn want him to go?"

"Yes, at John Gully's recommendation."

"John Gully, eh?" the Duke repeated, taking a pinch out of the sparkling snuff-box that Bendigo had brought from Doncaster. Bendigo himself said nothing, but his heart was all for London, since Jem Burn was Zillah's uncle, and who knew but that Cherry Ribbons might be found at the sign of the Queen's Head.

Mr. Jephson came into the room under the Duke's extended arm. "Here's the letter," he said. Bendigo watched the Duke's eyeglass gleam through the letter. After reading it he shook his head.

"I'm sorry to put anything in the way of John Gully's patronage," he said, "but Bendy's already spoken for. It looks to me as if Jem Ward is ready to take him under his wing. I met the mail this morning and I got a letter from Jem at Liverpool offering to take Bendigo up. It's an odd thing that both offers should come together."

"Now that Deaf Burke has gone to America it isn't likely that Jem Ward will be seen in the ring again," Sam Merriman said.

"All the same he holds the belt," the Duke interposed.

"That's true enough," said Mr. Jephson, "and I think myself that Bendy would be nearer to it in Liverpool than in London."

"Hear! Hear!" said the Duke, "that is exactly my opinion and well expressed. I'll read both the letters out and then you can judge for yourselves."

After hearing them Sam Merriman said: "As Bendigo is after the belt there's no argument about it. The Duke's right. He'll have to go to Liverpool."

When Bill Atkinson came in he said that he had been measuring a swell at the barracks, who had an ogle in mourning. He was a tiptopper and no mistake, who wanted everything to be in the first fashion, no matter what it cost.

"I asked him if he's got the blunt to pay us, as we'd been diddled before by swells at the barracks," said the dandy snip. "Well, at that, he lost his temper, and tried to knock me down, and I was afraid I should have to black his other ogle to keep him off. But when he found he couldn't hit me, he wanted to know who the devil I was. I told him politely that I was the lightweight champion of the Midlands, and he

said in a huff that he kept finding 'em, and he should be glad when he got out of the demned town."

They all laughed except Sam Morrison, who wanted Atkinson to come into the the skittle alley and settle which of them was the real lightweight champion, as he still thought he could give the dandy snip a milling.

Bill Atkinson maintained with the others that the Liverpool road would lead Bendy to fame and fortune. He also undertook to make him a new rig-out for love as soon as he had suited his swell costumer at the barracks. Sam Turner had taken a "pub" in Staffordshire, and was therefore out of the voting.

"If old Jem Ward, the Black Diamond, has sent for Bendy, I shall live to see him champion of England yet," Mrs. Thompson declared. "The bonny blue belcher for ever!"

Opinion being almost unanimous that Bendy ought to go to Liverpool, the Duke of Limbs, who acted as penman to the Fancy, bit the feather of his quill. Then he walked up and down the room with the quill in his mouth, like a pointer with a partridge, and consideration in his eyeglass. Then he betook himself furiously to penmanship.

"My lad," he said, after spluttering wax in the candle and finding a seal at his fob, "I've written to Jem Ward to tell him when to expect us."

"Are you going with me, Duke?" asked Bendigo in surprise.

"Egad! yes, my lad, as your guide, philosopher, and friend. The Ramsdale estate can grow nettles and my cattle eat their heads off in the stables until I come back. I am going with you to Liverpool to look after your interests."

As their coach stood outside the Maypole Inn from which it departed, a gaily painted post chaise, with

outriders and a postboy blowing his horn entered the market-place at a gallop. The six horses attached to the post chaise and its extravagant equipage drew general attention.

"Egad! a coach and six," laughed the Duke, "and not driven by Ben Butler."

On the box seat, flourishing an elegant whip, sat Buck Castleton, with a quizzing-glass screwed into the ogle which Bendigo had damaged some days previously. The Duke and some of the Fancy were standing against the coach outside the Maypole.

"That's the swell I made the clothes for at the barracks," Bill Atkinson said to Bendy. Bendigo nodded, and as the post chaise swept by, wondered if he had seen the last of Buck Castleton, or if they would ever meet again. The Duke stuck his own quizzing-glass in his eye and glared after the extravagant turn-out and its supercilious driver. But the Buck had departed in all his glory.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BLACK DIAMOND

BENDIGO was not sorry he had Bill Atkinson's fashionably cut suit of clothes to put on when he reached Jem Ward's new house, the York Hotel, Williamson Square, Liverpool, for scarcely had he made himself presentable than the Fancy foregathered to take stock of him.

Jem Ward was a fine upstanding figure of a man, a credit alike to the bruisers of England and to the old-fashioned type of innkeeper, for he wore the knee-breeches, buckled shoes, and brocaded waistcoat of an earlier generation. He would even blow a cloud from a long clay pipe, although his favorite smoke was a cigar, and his favorite drink sherry, for which it is not set down in the annals of the P.R. that any other prize fighter had ever much liking.

He had the manners and instinct of a gentleman, and his eyes were mild and good-humored although at times the old fighting light hardened in them. The Duke of Limbs was delighted to renew his acquaintance with the Black Diamond at most of whose fights he had been present.

Jem Ward believed in harmony, and he could sing a good song himself in a fine baritone voice. In fact, there never was an English bruiser who could sing a better song. He was also an excellent fiddler, and as Jem fiddled his customers began to foot it on the sanded floor. Bendigo found himself capering about with Young Molyneux known to the Fancy as the "Morocco Prince." There were other pugilistic partners on the

sanded floor, amongst them being Bill Looney and Bill Hampson, two Liverpool pets. Looney was a tough-looking fellow, who kept a tap in the neighborhood, and had dropped in to see Bendigo. He had defeated Bill Hampson on three occasions, one of the fights lasting close on four hours. During most of the time they had milled each other in a determined manner, but they forgot all about their little differences in the prize ring as they footed it to Jem Ward's fiddle.

As the Duke had come to Liverpool to arrange for Bendigo to fight and not to dance to a fiddle, after breakfast next morning he asked the old champion whom he considered the best man for them.

"It's between Young Molyneux and Young Langan of Ireland," Jem said. "The black's a clever pugilist, who could be depended upon to put up a good fight. I don't know much about Langan, as Matt Robinson is keeping him a dark horse. He hasn't had a mill in England, but Matt doesn't think he has an equal with the gloves. He was matched against Deaf Burke, but as he managed to get locked up the night before the mill, it never came off. Some people say he was afraid of meeting Burke. That's neither here nor there. I've had the same thing said about me. But the Deaf 'Un's supporters didn't fancy his chance or they would have subscribed the £500 I asked for stake money; then I'd have entered the ring against him and showed some of these sporting blades that the old Black Diamond was still champion of England."

The Duke polished his eyeglass on his blue silk birdseye with satisfaction, after listening attentively to Jem's loquacity on his favorite subject.

"Bendy," he said, when Jem Ward's back was turned, "your fortune's made. Jem still holds the belt, and from what he has said he plainly thinks you

are the best man to wear it after him. I contemplated going back to Nottingham by the next coach, but I shall now stay here to look after your interests."

Setting his ears up, the Duke suddenly dashed to the door, threw it open, and dragged Molyneux into the middle of the room.

The Morocco Prince rolled the whites of his eyes and gasped like a fish out of water, for the mighty Duke of Limbs had not treated him any too gently.

"What the devil were you doing behind that door?" he asked wrathfully. "Listening to what was said for somebody's benefit, I suppose."

"No, sah. I came here to arrange a fight with Massa Bendigo."

Bendigo stood up, commenced carefully to take his cutaway coat off, and expressed himself as perfectly willing to oblige Molyneux there and then. But the Duke put his quizzing-glass up, and the ruffles of the situation were merged in the glassy calm that it habitually spread over troubled waters.

"Not here, Bendy," he said in the firm voice of authority, "and not now. This is not the place nor the hour for a turn-up, and, besides, I'll deal with the blackamoor."

As Bendigo shrugged his bob-tail coat on again and sat down, Joe Whitaker swivelled his hard-cut figure-head at the back, his hairbrush whiskers bristling. "Now who's put you up to it, and what the devil do you want?" he roared.

Molyneux was in a panic. He stammered as an excuse for being behind the door that he had heard "gem'men" engaged in conversation, and didn't like to intrude.

The black was having bad luck in his exits and entrances, for as he tried to back respectfully out of the

door, Jem Ward propelled him through it into the room again by a kick which made up in heartiness what it lacked in civility.

"I won't have any damned touts hanging about my house. Everything's fair and above-board at the York Hotel. What do you want?"

Molyneux put on an aggrieved air, and expressed his willingness to meet Bendigo at his own weight, which was 11st. 2lb. Bendy grinned and shook his head.

"That's no good," he said. "My fighting weight's 11st. 10lb. and I'm not coming down."

"I'll fight Massa Bendigo at 11st. 7lb.," the black declared.

He was staring with mesmerized eyes at the Duke of Limbs, who, picking up a pewter tankard, doubled it up by the sheer strength of his grip.

"I'll not let Bendigo swale a pound of tallow for any damned nigger in England," the Duke emphatically declared. "Send for some boxing gloves, Jem. I'll put 'em on with Young Molyneux instead of Bendy. We'll see if he can bend my ribs like old Tom Molyneux did Captain Barclay's."

But upon hearing this the "Morocco Prince" slipped through the opposite doors, and looking out of the window they saw him sprinting down Williamson Square for his life.

"He came to spy out the land," laughed Joe Whitaker, "and it didn't exactly flow with milk and honey."

"It doesn't look as if that pewter tankard would ever flow with good beer again either, Duke," Jem Ward complained.

"We'll patch up the loss with silver," Joe Whitaker said, throwing down a crown. "Your pewter's too dashed tender for a man who has a fist on him, Jem."

"I'll have it for a keepsake," Jem Ward declared,

taking it up. "And now let me introduce to you Mr. Ford, of the Bell Tavern."

"I am ready to find Bendigo an opponent for a side stake of from £25 to £50," Mr. Ford said addressing the Duke.

"Who is your man, sir?"

"Charlie Langan, from Dublin, better known as Young Langan."

"Egad! it's the match I'm looking for. Jem will act as stakeholder."

"Here's our man," Mr. Ford said, and beckoned up a sturdy-looking young Irishman with emerald-green fighting colors round his neck. Bendy came forward and they shook hands, whilst their backers each paid forfeit money to Jem Ward.

"The match is on," he said. "All that now remains is for articles to be drawn up between Bendigo and Young Langan, and, gentlemen, may the best man win."

The Duke was considering whether Sam Turner might not be persuaded to take up Bendigo's training, when Jem Ward introduced Peter Taylor, who was wrathfully nursing a black eye.

"This is the very man you want," he said. "He was on the road with Bendigo in Eckersley's boxing booth."

"Egad! so he was. But I thought Matt Robinson had engaged him to train Langan."

"I undertook to train him but not to fight him," Peter Taylor growled. "He began milling me this morning because I wanted him to do some extra road work. I've done with him. Let him get some of his Irish friends to look after him."

"They've lost a good man in Peter Taylor," Jem

Ward said aside to the Duke, "and I shouldn't give them the chance to get him back."

"Before we talk business," the Duke said bluntly to Peter Taylor, "have you any inclination to go back to Langan and Matt Robinson?"

The black eye scowled. "I'll see them all in blazes first."

So the Duke seized his opportunity, and Taylor was there and then engaged to train Bendigo.

Young Langan went in training at Matt Robinson's under Molyneux, the Morocco Prince, and Dan Donovan, an Irishman.

"If you're looking for a bit of good grass for grazing purposes," Sam Turner wrote, proud of the fact that being an old Blue Coat boy he could handle the quill, "there's a lot of it grows round here, and you might do worse than bring your two colts over. I could turn 'em out in a velvety paddock with ropes and posts where they could nibble to their heart's content."

"Egad! such an invitation is too good to let go by," said the Duke, and drove over to the Bell Inn.

Langan's backers said nothing would suit them better, so the fight was arranged to take place within a few miles of Sam Turner's Staffordshire public house, the Albion Inn. The Nottingham Fancy made up a party to join the Duke and Bendy there. Matt Robinson, Mr. Ford, Young Langan, and his trainer put up at the Three Swans opposite, and there was such an overflow of sporting company at both houses that the knowing ones soon scented a mill in the air.

Jem Ward arrived at the Albion with the Duke and Bendy the day before the fight, and it was a great time for Sam Turner. He could not do enough for his Nottingham friends, who laughingly avowed that

with his cutaway coat, pewter buttons, and knee breeches, Sam looked as if he had gone back to the Blue Coat School again.

"Why, I'll be hanged if there isn't old Jack Langan over the way," the Duke declared, sporting his quizzing-glass.

"Do you mean Young Langan, Duke?" Bendigo asked.

"I mean old Jack Langan who fought Tom Spring on Worcester race course in 1824—a mill I myself saw, although I missed their second meeting a few months later."

"It's no great wonder to see Jack Langan over at the Three Swans, sir," said Jem Ward, "since he keeps the St. Patrick Inn, at Liverpool, and will have come along with Matt Robinson."

At that the Duke must go over to Jack and they had a crack about old times, and how their mutual friend, Tom Spring, fared at the Castle in Holborn.

Then Whitaker wanted to know if Young Langan was a kinsman, and taxed on that matter, Jack admitted there might be some slight relationship on one side or the other, but the devil only knew on which side it was.

"But I'd come many a mile to see a man who bore my name fight a man who didn't," Jack declared, "an' for the love of a foight I'd come twice as far."

He was the same old Jack Langan that the Duke had known, with the same rich brogue and teasing wit, and under the opposition signboard Joe Whitaker clinked glasses to the best man, feeling confident in his heart and his pockets that man would prove to be Bendigo.

When Sam Turner's guests looked out of the upper windows next morning the ridge-tiles of the Three Swans opposite were as wet as a duck's back, and rain

was coming down in torrents. It was the morning of January 24th, 1837, and a bitterly cold wind lashed the rain against the old gables of the Albion Inn with wintry fury. After partaking of a hearty breakfast, the two camps of sportsmen cursed the rain no less heartily, for it did not appear inclined to abate and there was an uncomfortable feeling about that after all there might be no fight. Ropes and stakes were, however, dispatched in a covered cart to the little village of Woore, about eight miles distant, which had previously been decided upon as the venue of the prize fight. Acting upon their instructions, the men who conveyed the ropes and stakes pitched the ring in a hedge-sheltered field just beyond the village, although the rain still pelted down, and the outside of the ring was trodden into mire by their heavy boots.

Tilted wagons, covered carts, traps, and gigs protected by carriage umbrellas, began to arrive at the two village inns, and the disconsolate sportsmen declared that whether the ash or the oak put forth its leaves first that spring there was one thing certain they were all in for a soak.

They were, however, determined that it should not be one-sided, and publicans and pot-boys were hard put to it to supply the refreshment demanded. All the time the incessant rain ran down the pantiles of the Horse and Jockey and dripped from the thatched roof of the Falcon, where Bendigo and his supporters were staying. The village street was turned into a duck pond, and gloomy sportsmen in caped cloaks and bedraggled beavers kept pulling watches out of their fobs, cursing the deluge, and despondently ordering more refreshment, the only apparent effect of which was to make them more despondent and dismal.

After three hours of gloom the weather unexpect-

edly cleared up, and a move was made for the ring in the field. It might be only a lull in the downfall, but, at any rate, they must take advantage of it. The turf was in wicked condition for a prize fight, being sodden and soaked, and both men were allowed to wear spiked boots, a condition being laid down that if either of them wilfully spiked his opponent's foot, he lost the fight on a foul. The Irish green and blue birdseye colors were tied to the stakes, whilst the men prepared for battle in the rain-soaked ring.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DUKE THROWS HIS HAT IN

IN SPITE of the muddy field, the two men wore ribbons at their garters in the old fashion, and the birdseye and Irish green fogles were soon flying at the stakes. The crowd, at the ringside scarcely numbered 500 owing to the weather, but the Nottingham Fancy was well represented, and Bendy was the favorite at 6 to 4. The Duke glanced at the elements through his quizzing-glass, and advised him to get to work and make the best of his time, as it might rain again. Then the men were introduced in a few words, and, after shaking hands, came to the scratch.

As soon as the mill started, Matt Robinson, old Jack Langan, and the Irishman's supporters, received something of a shock. For, dodging Langan's left, Bendy split his cheek with a terrific right. By shifty head work, he let Langan's second blow glance off his chin, smashed his right to the face again, ducked aside, nailed his man on the ribs, and as he flinched away, drove in a stinging left to the nose, which uncorked Langan's claret, and afforded the Nottingham Fancy cause for congratulation.

"First blood to Bendigo," claimed the Duke of Limbs.

"Damme, it's a poor display," said the incensed Matt Robinson.

"Egad! it is indeed on your man's part," said the imperturbable Duke of Limbs, "but if the vintage is not sufficiently affluent, we will waive the claim to first blood."

"Why, dash it all, Duke," cried Bill Atkinson, the

dandy snip. "Langan's smeller is all in a ruddy mess. Bendy gave him a beautiful nose-ender."

Bendigo made out there was some dispute at the ropes, and, following his man up, gruelled him with both hands.

The result was a copious flow, which put the matter beyond any argument. Thereupon the imperturbability of the Duke of Limbs vanished and he waved the fogle with the blue ground and white spots above the heads of the crowd on his malacca cane. The Nottingham Fancy, following his lead fluttered their blue birdseyes in triumph. First blood to Bendigo beyond any shadow of doubt.

The sodden turf squelched and squirmed under their feet in spite of the spikes upon their boots, and a raw mist rising from the fields wrapped the men in its clammy cloak.

Langan had been badly shaken and surprised by the way Bendigo carried the fight across to him. Dan Donovan and Molyneux, the black, also looked gloomy, and the nigger had ceased to flash his ivories as he did at the beginning of the fight.

But having slipped in the thick of the rain-drenched grass, and got a cold shower bath, Bendy seemed chilled to the bone. He went to the scratch shivering as if from an attack of ague. By dodging and good ring-craft he managed to save himself, but there was great consternation amongst his supporters, and for two or three rounds the fight was a nightmare to Bendy. His teeth chattered in his head. He had the shivers and shakes, and was in a pitiable plight owing to the chill.

Sam Turner towelled him, and under the instructions of the Duke a rough sort of massage was used.

But for a time it looked as if the fight must go to Langan.

"Our man will pull around yet," Joe Whitaker declared with his usual confidence in Bendigo, and he proved right.

"Lam into him, Bendy," Sam Turner advised. "It'll warm yer up."

Bendigo found this advice difficult to follow, but he gradually shook off the effects of his chill, and the Nottingham Fancy soon lost their long faces. It grew apparent to every good judge of milling that Bendy was coming back. He sent in some hard knocks, and threw his man on the muddy turf. As he recovered he made up for lost ground. He began to hit Langan as he had hit Ben Caunt at Hucknall. Many of the Liverpool men, Jem Ward amongst them, had never seen Bendy in the ring before, and his form was a revelation.

With one blow he knocked Langan clean off his legs, dropping him flat on his back in the mire where he lay floundering.

After that he made a chopping-block of him, hitting him round the ring with both hands. Langan was down at the close of every round. He was outfought, and Bendy's hitting was now terrific. Langan had a shutter up, and his face was dreadfully swollen. At the end of the 32d round he was carried into his corner in a helpless condition. Both peepers were closed, and he could no longer grope his way about the ring.

"Throw the sponge up," Matt Robinson told Dan Donovan. "I shall take Langan away. He can't fight any more."

"Bendigo wins!" the referee declared, and once again the Nottingham blue birdseye twinkled round the ring, whilst Sam Turner pulled the green fogle down from the middle stake.

Excepting for mud and mire, Bendigo was not much worse for the battle, and, coming over to him, Jack Langan examined his hands. The bony knuckles were sharp as a terrier's teeth, and, although raw with hard hitting, they were not at all swollen up.

"If Tom Spring had had your hands, my lad, there would never have been a champion like him in the P.R." said old Jack. "After our mill at Manwood, both his hands were gone. They were the size of mufflers. Mr. Sant, his backer, declared he had never seen such hands in his life, and there and then he made Tom promise never to fight again."

"It was the same with Jem Belcher when he fought Tom Cribb. Tom's nob was too hard for his hands, and what could poor old Jem do with his eye out, and his hands in a sling?" said the Duke. "It's a pity that Jem Belcher and Tom Spring belonged to different generations, and never met."

"You're right, Duke," said Jack Langan, with a twinkle. "The finest fight they ever had was never fought, owing to the regretful circumstances you mention. But a word in your ear, Mr. James Ward."

Old Jack Langan laid one hand on Jem Ward's shoulder, and patted Bendigo on the back with the other.

"If you're thinkin' of lavin' the championship belt in your will, this is a good bhoy to lave it to."

"But Jem's not making his will yet," laughed the Duke.

"No, I'm hanged if I am," said Jem Ward. "I've got one good fight left in me yet, Jack Langan."

"If it wasn't such wretchedly cold weather, and they hadn't trodden the grass into a bog, Jem, it's myself who would step into the ring with you, and oblige you with the fight that's left in me. But what's

the use of two old dogs showing their teeth. Throw the bone to the young 'uns, and let them fight for the belt."

"The man who beats me shall have it, Jack, and none other. I'm open to fight any man in England to-day for the championship."

The words had scarcely left Jem Ward's lips when Bill Looney, came springing forward.

"Gentlemen, you all heard what Mr. Ward said, and if I can get a backer at the ringside I'll keep him to his word."

"I never broke it yet," Jem Ward said wrathfully. "But understand this, Looney, I'm not going to fight a second-rate man like you for less than £200."

"I'll find the money, and I'll show you whether I'm a second-rater when I get you there," Bill Looney declared, pitching his hat in the ring.

"I practically retired from the ring years ago, gentlemen," Jem Ward said, "but I am prepared to accommodate this great and mighty one in his own estimation, the belt to go with the stakes. Now then, Looney, step up and let me see the color of your money."

An excited crowd pressed against the ropes waiting what would happen. Bill Looney was wrangling with his backers, who appeared to be crying off their bargain, supposing them to have made one.

"Make it £100, Mr. Ward," he appealed, his face as red as a turkey cock.

"Not a penny under £200," Jem answered, stolidly. "I've thrown in the belt, and you can raise the money on your own public house if you're so sure of winning it."

After a vain attempt to persuade mine host of the Molly Maloney Tavern to back him for the other £100, Bill Looney addressed the crowd at the ringside.

"If Mr. Ward won't lower his price, there'll be no fight," he said.

"You challenged me and chucked your castor over the ropes."

"Yes, I did, but I find now that I can't make the price you ask. I'm not afraid of you, Jem Ward, although my backers seem to be."

"That's neither here nor there. Are you prepared to accept the terms I offer and pay a deposit on the £200 to Matt Robinson?"

"No, I'm not, much against my will."

"Then there'll be no fight, for I'm damned if I'll come down a penny."

The silence that followed was broken by the Duke. "One moment, please. Is Bill Looney prepared to fight any man that can be brought against him, for a lower stake?"

"Any man in the world," Bill Looney declared, with unnecessary emphasis.

"Then I'm ready to back Bendigo against you for £50 a side."

Bill Looney's set features lighted up with evident exultation. "He's the man for me. I was trying to get a fight on with him before he met Langan."

"Well, here's the £50," said the Duke, "and here's Bendigo."

"Shy your castor in the ring, my lad," said Jem Ward. "Begad! I'll do it for him," said the Duke, and pulling his elegant gray beaver off he sent it skimming over the heads of the crowd into the ring.

Bendy vaulted over the ropes after the hat, and brought it out of the mud like a retriever. And the Duke was never more proud of anything in his life than the patch of mud that he carried on the side of his Corinthian beaver all the way back to Liverpool.

"My lad," he said, "nothing will please old Jem better than this fight between you and Looney. The

thing to remember is, Bill Looney is a man who never knows when he's had enough. He can mill for four hours at a stretch, and he's never lost a battle yet. They say he's another Jack Carter. If he beats you, the blue birdseye will never be seen at the stakes in a championship fight."

"How do you think I should face my old mother, Duke, if I had to tell her the blue birdseye had fallen in disgrace at Liverpool? You may be sure I shan't lose this fight, if it comes off."

"I thoroughly believe you will win it, Bendy," the Duke said, "or, damme, do you think I'd have thrown my castor in the ring! Begad! you've got something more than the pride of the blue birdseye to keep up, and that is the tilt of my gray beaver, so, see to it, my lad, that the only mud it picks up is out of the ring in which you've beaten your man and won a good battle."

The social evening at Jem Ward's, to celebrate the outcome of the fight, ended in fiddle and fuddle.

"Let's have plenty of lights, Jem," the Duke said, poking the fire up into a roaring blaze. "I like to see a room well filled with candles. Give me a man who can stand liquor, fire, and lights. For, mind you, it takes a good man to face old port and strong light for a continuance."

The Duke was seasoned to it. But he soon had his weaker brethren of the Fancy blinking like owls, and the candles dancing to Jem Ward's fiddle. Old Jack Langan fell asleep in his chair as drunk as a lord; but sober as a judge to the last, the mighty Duke of Limbs strode firmly upstairs, lighting the way with a steady candle for the men who carried Jack to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI

JOHN GULLY SPORTS THE BLUE BIRDSEYE

THE pretty little market town of Chapel-en-le-Frith, in the High Peak of Derbyshire, which does its marketing in the face of a stone cross dating from Stuart days, and still sounds the curfew bell as it did from Norman times, was the prearranged meeting place of the Midland Fancy one glorious morning in mid-June.

Hundreds came tramping on foot, turning from the dusty highroad to walk beside the mossy stone walls of the Derbyshire byways, which had birds and mice and all manner of creeping things concealed between the crevices.

Whilst they kept to the highway, they were passed by swells in drags, tilburys, and barouches, publicans in gigs, traps, and dog-carts, whilst now and again a chaise and pair would sweep along to the music of a post-horn. Every sort of conveyance that had been laid up in mews or stables seemed to have been put on the road.

Gossipy dalesmen told inquirers that those footing it and those in vehicles were all on the way to the fight; that the posts and ropes were already up, and that it would be the greatest "mill" that had ever taken place in all broad Derbyshire. For Bendigo, of Nottingham, who had beaten Ben Caunt and Brassey and Langan, was to fight Bill Looney, of Liverpool.

The stakes and ropes were in readiness, but had not been hammered up when a contingent of the Nottingham Fancy, including Mr. Jephson, Sam Turner, Sam Merriman, Bill Atkinson, and other staunch supporters of the blue birdseye drove up in one conveyance after

another. The Duke, Jem Ward, and Bendigo's party had taken possession of the Old Pack Horse Inn, which they claimed by throwing the blue birdseye over the sign.

There was an interval for fraternizing between Bendigo's old supporters and his new Liverpool following, and where to pitch the ring came under discussion.

Some were for Tunstead Milton, on the Manchester road, some for a field on the Glossop road, and some for Dove Holes, three miles nearer Buxton. But Chapel-en-le-Frith was overcrowded with sportsmen and conveyances, and as there was no likelihood of interruption from magistrates or police, Jem Ward asked what sense there was in making a move and going farther afield, perhaps to fare worse. There were crowds of eager sportsmen outside the Old Pack Horse, the Dog Inn, the Oddfellows' Arms, and other of the village inns, clamoring for refreshment and asking where the "mill" was to take place.

Matt Robinson and Jack Langan, who were backing Looney, were called into consultation with Jem Ward and the Duke of Limbs, and it was decided to pitch the ring in a dell close at hand, one of the prettiest spots that Chapel-en-le-Frith, with all its loveliness, could boast.

They could hear the men hammering the stakes deep in from the Old Pack Horse, and Bendy with his blue birdseye loosely knotted round his neck, was introduced by Jem Ward to one after the other of the various sportsmen who had come from all parts to see the "mill."

He was pleased to meet again with Levi Eckersley and Sam Pixton, his old companions of the travelling boxing booth, who had run over with the Manchester brigade. Among the Birmingham Fancy were Tass

Parker, Hammer Lane, and Young Johnny Broome, good men who wished Bendigo well, but hesitated whether to put their money on him.

For they had seen Bill Looney in the ring with Bob Hampson, who was also present, and when a man can stand up to a ding-dong battle for three or four hours and seem little the worse for it, his staying-power commands respect.

Jack Carter, the old Lancashire champion, whom Jem Ward had beaten at Shepperton Grange nine years before, had also driven over from Manchester to be present at the ringside. He sported Bill Looney's colors, but shook hands heartily with the Black Diamond, and Bendigo.

"Bill Looney and old Jack Carter have one thing in common," Jem Ward told Bendy, "they never know when they are beaten. I had to knock Jack down seventeen times before he would give me best, and he hadn't a chance from the opening round. Except that he might pop a lucky one in and win the fight by a fluke. You'll have to hit Looney hard with both hands, and keep on hitting him hard to win. After the mill they drove Jack Carter to Staines in a gig and put him to bed. He didn't get about for two days, but I attended a suppering at Tom Springs's parlor the same night."

"I'll bear that in mind, Mr. Ward," Bendigo said with a grin. "If Bill Looney gets out of bed under two days he'll be lucky."

There was a surprise for Bendigo when the Duke told him that they had passed Mr. Jack Ridsdale on the road driving Ben Caunt and his uncle, Ben Butler, to the fight, in a smart turn-out.

"Hasn't the big chucklehead given up prize fighting yet?" Bendy asked Joe Whitaker.

"Not he—this year he has beaten Bamford and

Butler, two country bruisers who are not known to the P.R., but sturdy opponents both of them."

"I heard some talk that Ben's backers would like to arrange another match with Bendigo," said Mr. Jephson.

"Then depend upon it we shall hear it from their own lips," said the Duke, "for here they come."

Big Ben Caunt shouldered his way through the crowd outside the Old Pack Horse, a towering and imposing figure as big as a house side, as the saying is. He was closely followed by his relative, Ben Butler, and a couple of sporting swells known to the local Fancy. One of them was an officer in mufti named Captain Hemyng. Bendigo remembered having seen him at the ropes when he gave Buck Castleton a dressing down in the barrack ring at Nottingham.

"Gentlemen, here's Ben Caunt," Ben Butler announced fussily.

Ben bobbed to the company, and Bendy bobbed back in monkey-like imitation, which set the place in a roar.

"Say summat and don't stan' gawpin'," Ben Butler advised his big nephew, who held out his leg-of-mutton fist to Bendigo and said:

"It's a long time sin' I saw thee at Hucknall. I heard tell o' thee beating Brassey and Langan, and now I've coom to see thee feight this chap from Liverpool."

"His name's Bill Looney," Bendigo grinned, "and he's loony enough if he expects to win. Put your money on the birdseye, Ben. It won at Hucknall Torkard."

"I'm ready to have another feight wi' you any day," Ben Caunt assured him. "You was too tricky

for me last time, lad, but I shall be up to all your dodges next. I'll make thee stan' up to me, lad."

"Come into the ring when I've finished with Bill Looney," Bendy suggested, "and I'll take you on as makeweight."

"If you want a man to stand up to you and exchange blow for blow, see that he's close on six-feet-three like yourself and weighs sixteen stone," said the Duke caustically. "What's the good of a man having twenty-four feet of sweet turf underfoot if he's not to use it?"

The military swell puffed himself out.

"Our man means that Bendigo kept dropping before he was hit," he objected.

"Did you see the fight, sir?" roared the Duke of Limbs.

The military swell admitted he did not.

"Well, I did, and I backed Bendigo to win, as I am doing to-day. I believe you were at the ringside when he threshed Buck Castleton with the mufflers. Now you'll see what he can do with the mawlies."

They were interrupted by a shout from the town end that the ring was all ready, and asking them to trot their men out, as Bill Looney and his backers were on the way there.

A cheer went up as Bendigo and his supporters drove through the thick of the crowd, but it was plain to see that the Nottingham "Lambs" were not in the majority. For there was a great muster from Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham, to support Bill Looney, who was regarded as having taken old Jack Carter's place as the Lancashire champion.

Dick Bethell, a good man and true, was appointed referee, and about 2000 sportsmen were grouped round the ropes, as thick as bees round honey, when a post

chaise with four steaming horses pulled up under an oak tree by the roadside, and three men came along the path trodden by many feet through the pasture.

One of them was a tall iron-gray man, wearing a beaver, and a blue-and-white spotted belcher handkerchief.

"By Gad! Here's John Gully!" cried the excited Duke of Limbs, waving his own beaver. "Gentlemen, a cheer for the gallant hero of the mill with the Game Chicken at Hailsham in 1805, and the victor in the double event with Bob Gregson."

The gray, grim, and dignified figure of Mr. Gully bowed to Joe Whitaker, who was an old sporting acquaintance, and removed his hat in acknowledgment of the responsive cheer given from the ringside as the double birdseye colors—Bendigo's blue and white spots, and Bill Looney's "Bristol yellowman," red and yellow spots—were set up at the stakes where the light summer breeze tossed them about. Mr. Gully had Nat Flatman, the little jockey, and two London sporting reporters with him. In his excitement Joe Whitaker did not notice the beetling brows and glowering looks of his old friend, Jack Ridsdale, of Hucknall. He had forgotten all about the horse-whipping incident, when Gully fell foul of his old racing partner, Mr. Ridsdale, at a hunt meeting, and laid his riding crop across Ridsdale's shoulders in public.

But his brother Jack, the Hucknall sportsman, remembered, and there was no balm in Gilead that could heal the weals left by Gully's whip on the family pride.

"On which side are you, Mr. Gully," asked the Duke of Limbs, unaware of his unintentional falling from grace, "the blue or the red birdseye?"

"I have come here to see Bendigo win," said John

Gully, "which is why I am wearing this spotted blue belcher."

"Then by Gad, sir, you're on our man, and your place is here with us. Bendigo is the bantam for our money. He has some good Liverpool supporters, but Manchester and Birmingham are behind the red and yellow birdseye."

The Duke made room for John Gully and his companions against Jem Ward, with whom he shook hands heartily.

As the men stripped and came to the scratch the odds were 5 to 4 on Bill Looney. For the fun of the thing Joe Whitaker tried to get a bit on with Jack Ridsdale, but his old friend either did not hear or was guilty of the incivility of turning his back on the offer. He and Ben Butler were both betting against Bendigo, but John Gully was a tower of strength to the blue birdseye, taking on the 5 to 4 sportsmen as fast as he could set them down.

The bit of Derbyshire pasture was velvety to the feet, the blue sky above and the swarms of daisies in the grass were good omens for Bendigo's blue birds-eye. He had confidence in himself, but, for that matter so had Bill Looney, who was burly and strong as a bull, with immense reserve strength, and no disposition to give in until he had used up every ounce of it. He had not tasted defeat yet, and he did not intend to accept it at the hands of the Nottingham man.

Bendigo drew first blood by landing a teaser flush on Looney's box of dominoes. The bleating of the "Lambs" was heard at the ropes, but Looney hit out vigorously and upset their calculations by throwing Bendigo heavily.

Bendy came back grim and grinning and he began to hit Bill Looney such smashes with his bony knuckles

that the pet of the Liverpool Fancy lost all claim to good looks.

One of his eyes was closed, his face was cut up, gaps were knocked between his teeth, and his features were swollen up. Bendy concentrated on his opponent's face and head, "nobbing" him as he had never done a man before. It took two hours' hammering to persuade Looney's backers that he was going to lose and longer still to convince Looney himself. He was game until he could no longer see or stand, Bendigo winning in two hours and twenty-two minutes, by which time his antagonist lay senseless on the turf. Although it was the hardest fight he had taken part in, Bendigo carried few marks of the battle, but Looney's supporters had to be content to leave their fallen champion behind to be nursed at a country inn, as well as a good deal of the money they had brought with them to the ringside.

Jack Ridsdale was savage at the way things had gone. He had lost a lot of money on Looney, and the sting of the situation was that it had gone into Gully's pockets. Captain Hemyng was out as well, and so was Ben Butler. They were all badly out, in fact, and there stood Jem Ward, the old champion of England, handing Bendigo the blue and the red birdseye colors taken down from the stakes.

Bendy was being cheered by the Fancy, the Nottingham Lambs bleating loudest, when Ben Caunt thrust his bulk against the ropes, making the stakes sag, and pitched his castor into the ring.

"I'll feight you for what you like," he bellowed. "I've got Squire Ridsdale and Captain Hemyng for backers as well as my uncle, Ben Butler."

Up went the Duke's satirical quizzing-glass.

"Why the devil don't you follow your hat into the

ring then?" he snapped. "A round or two more will make no difference to Bendigo."

"Who is this yokel?" asked John Gully grimly.

"Ben Caunt, of Hucknall Torkard. Bendy has fought him once and beaten him on a foul."

"It worn't a stan'-up feight," Ben declared, trying to straddle over the ropes. "I never gen in."

Bendy had put Ben's big hat on and buried under it was groping about the ring as poor Bill Looney had been doing a few minutes before.

"I wain't be made a laughingstock on," Ben Caunt complained.

"Keep out of the ring then, chuckle-head," Bendy advised, pitching his hat back to him over the ropes.

"It's a fair challenge," Mr. Ridsdale declared, a dull flush on his face as he caught Gully's grim eyes upon him. "We are ready to match Ben Caunt against Bendigo for another try."

"That may be," Jem Ward answered, "but the match must be made through me."

"I've got this to add, Mr. Ward," Bendigo said dropping his jocose attitude, "I'm ready to fight Ben Caunt again, but I shall want bigger stake money. I'm not going to put my fists up against him or any other man for less than £100. I've beat Brassey and Langan and Bill Looney since I fought him at Hucknall for £25 a side. Circumstances alter cases. Now I want £100. That's my price, and Ben Caunt's backers can either take it or leave it."

"Hear! hear!" came from Joe Whitaker and the assembled Fancy at the ropes.

John Gully was watching Ridsdale attentively. He and Ben Butler were in hurried consultation. But the day had been disastrous, and neither of them cared to risk forfeit money.

"I'll lay 2 to 1 against Ben Caunt in hundreds," said Mr. Gully. "As the betting to-day started at 5 to 4 on Bill Looney, and Ben Caunt is a much bigger and heavier man, his backers have a golden opportunity to see some of the money back they dropped on to-day's fight."

It was humiliation rubbed into Jack Ridsdale with a vengeance, for he could do nothing but glare impotently back at Gully, and promise himself to be revenged on the grim-mouthed, gray-headed sportsman who stood between the Duke and Jem Ward—six feet odd of iron constitution and ironic disposition.

Ben Butler suddenly made up his mind.

"Mr. Ward, will you accept a £10 note on Ben Caunt's behalf to meet Bendigo for £100, the fight to be arranged to suit the convenience of both parties?"

Jem Ward turned to Bendigo and Joe Whitaker.

"What do you say to that?" he asked.

"Shake hands with him if he's got the money in his hand," Bendigo grinned. "But I leave it with the Duke."

"Ben Caunt's like a bear with a sore head," said Whitaker. "He wants another fight to see how he got it. My advice is let him have it, Jem."

So Jem Ward took the tenner.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you are witnesses that I accept the sum of £10, a tenth of the side-stake, in earnest of a meeting between Bendigo and Ben Caunt, the money to be forfeit if, for any cause whatever, Caunt fails to come up to the scratch on the date arranged."

As Ridsdale was turning his back on the ring he was swung round by Joe Whitaker's heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Now, what the deuce do you mean by this scurvy

treatment, Jack?" There was no gainsaying the Duke's big-fisted gesture.

"You've chosen to have Gully for your companion," Ridsdale retorted.

Whitaker saw the way of things.

"Egad! You don't wish me to cut old Jack Gully's acquaintance?"

"What would you do if he'd laid his whip across your coat-of-arms?"

"Either lay mine across his coat in return or shake hands with him. No hang-dog measures for me."

"A friend of Gully's is no longer a friend of mine," Ridsdale spluttered as he turned furiously away, and seeing the Hucknall sportsman would not be appeased, Whitaker let him alone.

A man who wore a three-caped coat and an old beaver hat at a jaunty angle, came running back from the lane to the ring flourishing a long whip. He was John Gully's jehu, and by the use of immoderate epithets, accompanied by weathercock gyrations with the whip, he gave them to understand that the post chaise in which he had driven the distinguished sportsman to the fight had disappeared.

"Either the horses have gnashed their leading strings and bolted, or some mace coves have prigged the prads, and the coach as well, whilst I was watching the mill, sir. It is a fiver to a flash of lightning we shall have to pad the hoof now."

So Mr. Gully set off with Bendigo, his backers, and Nat Flatman along the lane that led to the village. As they passed through the crowds on their way from the fight they were loudly cheered, and soon found themselves in the thick of a marching mob of admirers.

Bendigo was looking very little the worse for the fight and walked along grinning, with the blue birds-

eye fluttering round his neck, and had a word for everybody.

After a half-mile tramp, they came into the village, where Ridsdale, with Ben Butler's party in his turnout, drew back against the market cross to let them go by.

They scowled as Bendigo passed at the head of the procession between John Gully and Jem Ward, with the Duke waving the double birdseye colors on his walking stick. Bendy was between two champions of England, and it looked as if all the honors were coming his way, for the Black Diamond had made a good amount of grist out of the "mill," and it was no secret now that he favored Bendigo for the belt. It was not often that a couple of pairs of shoulders like those of John Gully and Joe Whitaker paraded together, and on this occasion, at least, Bendy might aptly be described as "the pet of the Fancy."

They all flocked into the Old Pack Horse Inn, which still had its sign covered over with the blue birdseye. Here there was an enthusiastic scene, and the landlord could not take money and serve drinks fast enough. He had never been so "throng" in his life.

The village was so congested with vehicles that it was a good thing when some of them began to clatter off. After laying the dust, many of those who had footed it started back on their way home, and the roads were like a fair. But some stopped for a jollification, helped along by Jem Ward's fiddle, which he had brought with him in its old baize bag.

John Gully let it be understood that he had come down especially to see Bendigo in the ring, and was so well satisfied that he could be depended upon to back him in his future battles.

Mr. Gully remarked that some months before he

had recommended Bendigo to Jem Burn as likely to be of use at the Gentlemen's Sparring Club, in the Haymarket, at which Bendy pricked up his ears.

"I thought Jem would offer to engage him on my recommendation," Gully said.

"He did," Joe Whitaker admitted bluntly, "but Jem Ward expressed a desire to have Bendy at Liverpool, and we thought he had better be where the belt was."

Gully saw the sense of that, but said that now he was under Jem Ward's wing it would never do for Bendigo to keep in the provinces, as a man must have a following at the London sporting houses to get a backing against Deaf Burke when he came from America. The sporting swells and the new order of Corinthians were all ready to claim the championship for him.

"He'll have to fight for the belt," Jem Ward said aggressively.

Thereupon Gully smiled as gently as his grim mouth would allow, and said at Jem's time of life he did not expect to see him in the ring again, or for that matter, to see any man in the ring again, who was the equal of the old Black Diamond.

Whilst Gully and Jem Ward were talking together, Nat Flatman edged up to Bendigo and the Duke as if he had something on his mind.

"There's more in what Mr. Gully says than meets the eye," he said. "You remember Buck Castleton, the swell you gave a good hiding on Doncaster race course when I rode a loser for the St. Leger. Well, Captain Castleton is now amongst the first flight of highfliers, and more the buck of the London Fancy than he ever was of York Barracks."

"Hum!" mused the Duke. "I heard he got a crack on the head and lost his watch at Tom Spring's."

"It was at Jem Burn's in the Haymarket, where Castleton is carrying on with that pretty gypsy girl he was after at Doncaster."

"Ha!" fumed the Duke, clenching his huge fist and glancing down at the signet ring. "Ha!"

"Carrying on, is he?" said Bendigo, gazing at the Duke's livid knuckles and gleaming ring.

The little, horsey man looked up at Bendigo, with eyes that asked him a question.

"He gives her jewellery and flashes his money, whilst her uncle is just as stingy."

"Egad! Jem Burn doesn't look after his pretty niece as he ought to," mused the Duke.

"She wears Buck Castleton's jewellery, does she?" Bendy asked slowly.

"Can you blame her? When I saw her she kept asking, 'Why doesn't Blue Birdseye come to me?'"

"Asks why don't Blue Birdseye go to her, does she?" repeated the Duke.

"Then I'll go to her," Bendigo answered, his mind made up now to go to London, and try his fortune at the Gentlemen's Sporting Club in the Haymarket.

"Oh, begad, yes!" said the Duke. "Go to her, of course you must. Besides, John Gully is all for you giving the London highfliers a taste of your quality, and so am I, my lad. Especially that white-feathered high-flier, Buck Castleton."

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE GENTLEMEN'S SPARRING CLUB

BENDIGO told Jem Ward he had made up his mind to visit the metropolis, and put in a few weeks at Jem Burn's and introduce himself to the swells as Mr. Gully advised. The old champion was by no means averse to this now he had the deposit for another match in his pocket. So, two or three days later Bendigo set off by the Liverpool coach. By a coincidence, Captain Hemyng also travelled as an outside passenger on the same coach. But Bendigo being recognized, he was admitted to the select company of the driver on the front seat, and did not notice he had one of Ben Caunt's supporters for a travelling companion.

Directed by the guard of the coach, Bendigo turned down Windmill Street in the Haymarket early next morning, and stared about him for the sign of the Queen's Head. It was not hard to find, and as he stood in front of the old-fashioned public house in the narrow and dingy court, where half-timbered gables jutted so far across that neighbors on opposite sides could either shake hands or put their fists up from the upper windows, Bendy wondered what fate and fortune had in store for him. He had a few yellowing bruises still on his face, and sported his best silk birdseye round his neck.

Never faint-hearted in his life, he pushed open the door and entered. She was behind the bar with cherry ribbons in her hair, as he had seen her first in her tinsel on the show front at the fair. There were not many customers, and he went straight up to her. The tan of the heath had faded from her face, but that was the

only touch of loveliness it had lost; her neck was snowier now, and lured the eye with shining jewels. As she saw him some of the old gypsy color dashed her cheeks with dusky roses.

"Blue Birdseye, by all that's wonderful!" said she with a mock curtsy. "What's brought you here? I heard you were at Jem Ward's in Liverpool."

"I've come, like Tom and Jerry, to see life in London," said Bendigo. "The Liverpool coach brought me." Then he added grimly, "I came here to see if Buck Castleton wanted another milling. I heard from Nat Flatman that you were wearing his jewels."

Her dark eyes flashed angrily, and the necklace burned her white neck, but as she attended to customers the mood passed, and she gave Bendigo a soft and velvety glance. For he was young and handsome, and he had come to London at her bidding in answer to the message she had sent to Nat Flatman, the little jockey.

"I never thought the gee-gaws the gentleman gorgio gave me would fetch you to London, Blue Birdseye," she whispered.

"I came as well to let the cockneys see who's to be champion of England," he grinned, putting down a shilling for a drink.

This time she gave him a bright look, for this young man, with a flutter of blue birdseye at his neck, was indeed a bold admirer, and she remembered having told his fortune on the heathside at Hucknall.

"Uncle Jem will want to know who you are," she said.

"I've got letters of recommendation to him from Jem Ward and Mr. Gully."

"He's in the parlor with some of the swells," she said. "You'd better come in and see him."

She led the way through the passage and Bendigo opened the door of Jem Burn's parlor which, next to Tom Spring's at the Castle in Holborn, was now the most fashionable haunt of the London Fancy. As he expected, there were swell coves and milling coves sitting round, blowing clouds from long clay pipes, and drinking. A gentleman with a frilled shirt-front and the most dandified clothes he had ever seen was reading aloud an account of a prize fight from a sporting newspaper, and everyone was paying such close attention to it that Bendigo's entrance at that particular moment was resented. He was met with scowls and growls, and advised to sit down, which he did.

The swell who was reading raised his quizzing-glass in a most mincing manner and regarded the intruder with a bored expression.

"Perhaps you'd better attend to the gentleman who has just entered, Jem," he drawled.

"I shall be pleased to show him civility and attention when you've done, my lord," said the pugilistic landlord.

"If he's a gentleman he won't mind waiting," somebody growled.

"He wouldn't come here if he wasn't," Jem Burn answered with an urbanity which smoothed things over, and the aristocratic swell at once resumed reading his newspaper.

To Bendigo's amazement he found himself listening to a graphic account of his fight with Bill Looney at Chapel-en-le-Frith, evidently written by one of the sporting scribes who had come up in Mr. Gully's post chaise. He was given a very fair amount of credit for his win, and the mill was described as one of the best that had been witnessed for years.

Bendy was also spoken of as Jem Ward's protégé and a likely claimant for the belt.

"The Deaf 'Un will make short work of him when he comes back," said the swell with the newspaper. "It's a remarkable thing that all the best crowing game cocks are in the Midlands. They don't seem to care to come up to London. Now I happen to know that John Gully recommended this fellow Bendigo to Jem Burn, and our worthy host invited him to come and show what he could do at the Gentlemen's Sparring Club, but he prefers Jem Ward's house at Liverpool."

"That's quite true, my lord," Burn said, making his way across to Bendigo, for Jem's boast was that he showed the same measure of civility to every customer as he did of ale. He bent down to take Bendigo's order, and was more than surprised at what was whispered in his ear.

"Gentlemen," he said in a flurried manner, "allow me to introduce to you Bendigo, of Nottingham, the winner of the fight with Bill Looney and the subject of his lordship's remarks."

"I must disclaim any idea of disparaging the young man in the remarks you refer to, Jem," Lord Caledon said, speaking not only with politeness but with a friendliness in his tone that did him credit. "I spoke rather warmly, but I am ready to make up by a bout with the mittens. Egad! If he taps my claret first all the fashionable young bloods will want a turn-up with your new man from the country."

"That's handsome of you, my lord," Jem Burn said, and, eager to take advantage of the offer, he said to Bendigo: "We have some of the big swells here. There is no time like the present. The speaker is Lord Caledon. What do you say to having 'em on

with his lordship? He can use his dukes better than some of the pugs."

"You don't want me to start by milling one of your best customers, do you?" Bendy asked.

"It'll take more doing than you think. Stall him off, and don't let him nip in too often. Steady him with a tap on the sneezer, but don't black his ogles. He's going to marry one of the prettiest women in town, and a bridegroom with a black ogle isn't fashionable in St. George's, Hanover Square."

Jem Burn introduced Bendigo to the pick of the company, and Bendy bobbed to one sporting swell after another, including the Marquis of Waterford and Lord Longford, immaculately dressed young bucks, who were distinguished patrons of the Gentlemen's Sparring Club.

They went upstairs to a large and well-lighted room, where the sparring club was held. In the centre was a roped square on a raised platform, an exact reproduction of a twenty-four-foot prize ring on the lines of the old Fives Court, with the difference that the ring there was on a stage whilst this was only slightly elevated.

The ropes were clipped with hooks to the stakes, and lifting one of them off, the swell Corinthians partook of bottles of champagne which Jem Burn "cracked" in the ring.

The charge in the ring was a guinea a bottle, which allowed a handsome profit to mine host of the Queen's Head.

The toast of the Fancy was pretty Miss Musgrave, and since this was coupled with Lord Caledon's name, Bendigo took it that she was the lady he was to lead to the altar.

The ring was cleared and Bendigo stripped to the

buff. There was a good deal of speculation as to how he would peel, and some of the swells seemed surprised at his compact, supple, and sinewy build. But his attitude was voted to be *gauche* and ungainly, especially in comparison with the grace and ease of Lord Caledon, who wore a white cambric shirt, the front of which was exquisitely frilled by hot crimping irons.

"Give them a taste of your quality," Mr. Gully had advised Bendigo, and he showed the London Sparring Club something new in boxing. They were amazed by the evasiveness of this newcomer from the country—his tricky ducking and dodging and his slippery footwork. His good-natured grin, and the way he presented his nob to be hit at and missed by his pugilistic lordship made them all laugh.

"Egad, Bendigo, this is more like chaffing than milling," drawled Lord Caledon.

Then he let go a stinger. It was a good blow, a straight left that sent Bendigo's head back, and for the next minute they mixed it. The result was a copious flow of claret from Lord Caledon's "sneezer," which completely spoiled his frilled shirt. At that moment two swells entered the sparring room, and his lordship said:

"You're the very man we want, Castleton. I'll give the gloves up to you. Have a go at Bendigo, who seems to have received Jem Ward's blessing for the belt. I can't do much with him myself."

Buck Castleton, who had brought Captain Hemming with him to Jem Burn's, was noticeably out of countenance when he saw Bendigo in the ring, although he tried to carry the thing off with a high hand. Lord Caledon was as obtrusively anxious to shed the mittens as Castleton was to evade putting them on. His lordship's pluck was never for a moment in question,

but as a gentleman and a dandy he was disinclined to walk up the aisle of St. George's, Hanover Square, in company with pretty Miss Musgrave and a discolored ogle. Even as matters stood, it was doubtful whether he would be able to properly appreciate the elusive fragrance of orange blossom.

Bendigo wanted Buck Castleton in the ring.

He forgot for the moment that he had come to London to do credit to the blue birdseye. All he had in his mind now was giving the burly ex-cavalry officer a bigger thrashing than he did at Nottingham Barracks.

But Castleton did not intend putting the gloves on. He excused himself on the ground that he had not sufficiently recovered from the "nobbing" he received when the two ruffians set upon him and robbed him of his purse and "string of onions," by which elegant phraseology he meant his watch and seals.

"Besides, I shall have to appear against them one day this week at the Old Bailey," he declared, "and dammit all, you know, one must show some respect for judge and jury."

"Egad, what about the clergy?" put in Lord Caledon, mopping his too effusive nasal organ.

"Who is this fellow?" Castleton asked patronizingly.

Bendy goaded a scowl out of him by grinning back.

"Don't you remember trying to mill me on Doncaster race course?"

"I've some recollection of having a turn-up with a bruiser outside a boxing booth. I was drunk as a lord at the time?"

"So was Deaf Burke when you brought him into our show to mill me," Bendy returned. "But you'd got sober by the time we had our next little turn-up in the barrack ring at Nottingham."

"Bendigo, did you say his name was?" Castleton drawled. "Oh yes, by Jove, I remember the fellow now. I give him best like Caledon. He was too dashed good for me. Let him have a go at Young Dutch Sam, with the raw 'uns, Jem, and I'll stand the winner a tenner."

"That won't do," Jem Burn said hastily. But the young bloods round the ring were all for the mill, and so was Lord Caledon.

"Lock the door, Jem," he said. "There's nobody will give it away or scent it out."

Under pretence of seconding him, Castleton promised Young Dutch Sam £50 if he would smash Bendigo up, and he went into the ring to do it. But this undefeated pet of the London Fancy was giving too much weight away, and had imbibed too much heavy wet, or London porter, to be at his best, and for once in his life he had to take a milling before his fashionable patrons. Bendigo's brilliance could not be denied, and after a few rounds Young Dutch Sam was urged to retire, which he did with no good grace.

Lord Caledon and the Corinthians cheered Bendigo and would have stood him champagne, but he had no liking for "the fizzy stuff." Castleton paid over the ten-pound note, which he had lost, and had the mortification of seeing Bendy pocket it with a grin. Instead of taking him down he had cleared the way for a championship battle between him and Deaf Burke when the Deaf 'Un arrived from America, for the Marquis of Waterford, Lord Caledon, and Lord Longford, Burke's aristocratic backers, were now eager to match the two men.

As they drove away in a hackney carriage, Castleton expressed his chagrin at what had occurred to Captain Hemyng, who struck while the iron was angrily hot.

"Why not back Ben Caunt of Hucknall to beat Bendigo? They're matched already?"

"Who the devil is Ben Caunt?" Castleton snapped.

Captain Hemying told him, and blew Big Ben's trumpet with a flourish. Castleton was not convinced, but he decided to send Young Dutch Sam into the Midlands to see what chance Caunt stood of lowering Bendigo's blue birdseye.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE FLASH OF JEWELS

Now her true love had come back to her, Cherry Ribbons in a repentant mood took Buck Castleton's jewellery from her neck, out of her ears, and off her fingers, and was ever smiling at the young man with the blue birdseye who lent a helping hand at the Queen's Head as well as donning the gloves at the Gentlemen's Sparring Club. She either flashed scorn at Buck Castleton or was an absentee from the bar when he came in.

"The hussy's in her tantrums," Jem Burn said to Bendigo. "What the devil does she mean by turning her back on one of our best customers—a highflier amongst the Fancy and an out-an'-outer who has more blunt than half the bloods in town."

"What offence is there in a maid turning her shoulder on a blackguard?" Bendigo asked.

"You're using strong language, my lad."

"I'm ready to stand by it. I gave Buck Castleton a damned good hiding at Doncaster because he was paying too much attention to a pretty gypsy girl who was travelling with a caravan. She turned out to be your niece, Mr. Burn, and I tell you to your face she's no better looked after at the Queen's Head, in the Haymarket, than she was on Doncaster Moor. There, she wore gypsy gee-gaws. Here she has been wearing jewellery that Castleton gave her."

"If a wench in a caravan can look after herself, so can a wench at a London tavern," Jem Burn growled. "If Castleton's got money to throw away, why

shouldn't he buy her jewels? She's worn them all this time without any harm coming to it."

He glowered at Bendigo as if hesitating whether to tell him to pack off. Then thinking better of it, he said shrewdly, "If you care so much for Zillah, why don't you make her your sweetheart? I'm willing enough, and then you could look after her yourself."

"So you never thought of it until Uncle Jem put it in your head," said Cherry Ribbons, a little disdainfully. "How many years is it, Blue Birdseye, since we met at Nottingham Fair? I was a slip of a gypsy girl then, who jingled a tambourine on the show front, and wore cherry ribbons in her hair. I remember walking beside our caravan on the lookout for you when we were on the road again."

"It's a long time ago," Bendigo meditated.

"And you never thought of making me your sweetheart until this morning, when Uncle Jem put it in your mind."

"Maybe we've been sweethearts all the time."

"I like that, and we've only met two or three times since."

"We've met more than that if you count up. Fate's fiddled us together like sweethearts for a dance."

"You're wrong, Bendigo. Your sweetheart's been a blue silk birdseye all the time. A pretty sweetheart I should make you."

"Pretty enough, if you'd only settle down."

"What, to go and live with you in a grimy town, among brick houses and smoky chimneys?"

"My mother's contented enough where she lives," Bendy said stolidly. "There's the backyard and the lammas fields for an airing."

"You can't keep a gypsy out of the sunshine."

"It only shines in at the windows of the Queen's Head," said Bendigo.

"I shan't stay here even if I don't marry you, Blue Birdseye."

"Or if Buck Castleton doesn't marry you, Cherry Ribbons."

Her face went whiter. "Do you think I'd run away with him?"

"I think he'd run away with you if he had the chance."

"He won't get it, but who knows that I shall not marry a lord like Miss Musgrave. I'm to be one of the bridesmaids dressed like Daffy-down-dilly in a green gown. I might become ladyship. Think of it, Blue Birdseye."

She gave him a mocking curtsy, stiff and elaborate as if she wore old brocade.

"I came to see if you'd be my sweetheart," he reminded her.

She laughed outright. "When you're champion of England, Blue Birdseye."

"I'm not so far off the belt as I was," said Bendigo.

She looked him through and through with her dark, brooding eyes. "Sometimes I wonder," she sighed.

"Wonder what?"

"If we have not been sweethearts all along, as you say. Oh, Blue Birdseye, if you had only some of the Romany in you! But you've got your mother's arm and your fighting colors clinging round your neck, and when they are gone, I shall be gone too." The next moment she kissed him impulsively, escaped before he could imprison her in his arms, and laughed at his puzzled face.

"Tell Uncle we're sweethearts," she said.

Bendigo grinned at the ingenious way in which his

own evasive tactics had been turned upon himself. But he did not pretend to understand what Cherry Ribbons meant by it all. For once in his life he was completely out-manceuvred.

Bendigo told Jem Burn, and was congratulated by the old pugilist. But their sweethearting did not go well for long. Cherry Ribbons became brooding and sullen, with glowering and sulky gypsy eyes. But Bendigo went on sparring with the swells, and his grinning face, his skill with the gloves, and his Merry Andrew tricks made him a general favorite at the Queen's Head. Then came Lord Caledon's wedding to the beautiful Miss Musgrave at St. George's, Hanover Square. Cherry Ribbons was one of the bridesmaids, looking bewitching in a pretty dress which she said his lordship had paid for, although she wore Buck Castleton's jewels to it. All the best known Corinthians were present at the wedding breakfast, and Jem Burn brought Bendigo with him by special invitation. Before he went away Lord Caledon drew Bendigo aside and told him to beware of Buck Castleton. There was some rumor of an elopement that same night. An hour after midnight, it was said, Castleton would have a carriage in waiting at the Haymarket end of Windmill Street.

At one o'clock in the morning, the figure of a man waited in darkness at the bottom of the staircase in the Queen's Head. The stairs were creaking. Someone was coming down them stealthily. The figure below drew a bluff off the lantern he held and the light flashed out. Cherry Ribbons stood revealed in all her finery, with Buck Castleton's jewels flashing about her. He held the lantern up, it blazed upon her, and she shrank away from its accusing fingers of light.

"So this is the way you leave your uncle's house,"

said the figure at the foot of the stairs. "This is the price of Castleton's silks and jewels."

"You let me wear them," she answered bitterly, "in the bar and at Lord Caledon's wedding. You've never treated me like your own flesh and blood all the time I've been here."

"I'm not your uncle," said the man at the foot of the stairs, holding the lantern to his face.

"Why, it's Blue Birdseye," she cried. "I suppose my uncle set you on?"

"He's fast asleep in bed for all I know."

Strange to say Cherry Ribbons did not breathe any easier. "So you're standing at the door to keep me back from the man who will make a lady of me."

"You're wrong again," said Bendigo. "I'm standing at the door with a lantern to light you out of it. I don't want you to leave in the darkness. I'd like to see you go out with the light in your face, not like a thief in the night-time."

Two or three times she tried to pass the lantern, but a strange weakness came upon her. She could not move a step, and the look upon his face appalled her.

Bendigo had no thought for how he looked at the moment. Only the woman above saw the expression upon his face, but she moaned and hid herself in the darkness of the stairs, unable any longer to face the light.

"I'm not going out, Blue Birdseye," she said. "I've thought better of it and I'm going back to bed."

He heard her creeping up the stairs, and stood silent with the lantern for some little time. Then he went out by a side door, made his way to the stable and found a horsewhip. As he was coming out with the lantern and the whip, he saw Cherry Ribbons standing watching him.

"What are you going to do with that?" she said.

"I'm going to whip Buck Castleton."

"You're not," she cried tensely. "Whip me! I led him on, and I deserve it more than he does. Whip me till I scream out for you to stop, and my flesh is tingling with the lash instead of flash jewels. I'm a gypsy jade, and I've played you false. It's no good treating me fair. Treat me foul. If you want me, Blue Birdseye, let me see who's master, and I'll be your true love for ever."

"I'll do nowt of the sort," said Bendy simply. "I never raised my hand against a woman, and I never will. But I'll go out and whip Buck Castleton till he's ready to drive to the devil in his flash carriage."

"He'll drive to the devil, sure enough, one of these days," she answered. "Give me the whip."

She tore it from his grasp and slashed an unexpected blow at him that made him wince back into the stables with his hand to his face.

"I meant to hurt you, and I've done it," she said. "Now whip me for that."

He had staggered back with the lantern swinging. Now he held it steady again, and shook his head as she thrust the brass butt of the whip across to him.

In the lantern light she looked white and miserable. "Oh, Blue Birdseye," she half moaned, "my heart aches for hurting you. I could love you if you had whipped me as I deserve. Now I don't know what will come of it. But leave Buck Castleton alone. We shall all of us get our whipping sooner or later. No man or woman can escape it."

She lay sobbing half through the night with the whip under her pillow. As for Bendigo, he locked the doors, put the lantern out, and went to bed with the tingle of the whiplash on his face. Of all her gypsy

kisses this had had the most sting in it. And as for Buck Castleton, he waited for her half through the night, and cursed her through the other half.

The next morning Cherry Ribbons was tearfully repentant. She packed all the jewellery she had received from Castleton into a velvet casket, and with this in his possession Bendigo called upon Castleton. He emptied the casket upon an elegant card table, and asked the scowling swell to take stock of the contents.

"Jem Burn's niece has sent your jewellery back," Bendigo said tersely. "Her message is she never wants to see you or any of your presents again."

Buck Castleton was taken aback, but he did not entirely lose his sang-froid. "I seem to have incurred the brown charmer's displeasure," he drawled, "but, there are other ladies who will be proud to possess the sparklers she disdains."

"There are other sporting houses in London than Jem Burn's for a swell like you to patronize," Bendigo said, keeping his temper by an effort, "and if you don't want the fashionably furnished room turned into a milling crib, you'll promise to keep away from the Queen's Head in future."

"Curse Jem Burn's, I don't care if I never enter it again."

"If you do, and I happen to be there, I'll throw you into the street," Bendy said. "That's a fair warning."

As Bendigo turned on his heels, Castleton picked a brass poker from the elegant fireplace, and followed him. Bendigo's quick eye caught the movement through a pier glass. He swung round, and the buck went full length across two yards of Axminster carpet with a straight left to the jaw.

"That's what we call milling on the retreat at the

Gentlemen's Sparring Club," Bendigo grinned, and left Buck Castleton lying cursing on the carpet. When he arrived at the Queen's Head, Cherry Ribbons was moody and again repentant. She would rather have had the whipping and kept the jewellery she had sent back to her swell admirer.

As for Castleton, he was consumed by hatred and passion. If it cost him all he possessed, he was determined to carry off the gypsy charmer, and stop Bendigo from becoming champion of England. Things went all in his favor. Young Dutch Sam came back from the Midlands with reassuring news. Ben Caunt was the man to beat Bendigo, if properly trained, but it would take months to lick him into shape. He was a bear of a man, and would stand up to anything, but he was slow, and must be taught how to use his paws and keep his temper. So Buck Castleton decided to back Ben Caunt, and have him sharpened up in the bear-like tactics for which he seemed eminently fitted.

Within a few weeks Jem Ward sent for Bendigo to return to Liverpool, and commence training for his fight with Caunt. "Good-by, Blue Birdseye," said Cherry Ribbons, kissing him time after time, and clinging to him as the coach was ready to start from the Bull Inn, Aldersgate Street. "Good-by," she cried, waving a blue birdseye after the coach. Then she turned away, with mingled emotions in her heart, for something told her that the road would never bring him back to her.

CHAPTER XXIX

MISADVENTURE OF THE SPIKED SHOES

CASTLETON became the principal backer of Ben Caunt, who trained at Appleby, Leicestershire, and as the buck spent a good part of the hunting season there, he brought his friends from Melton to see Ben in training. But he wanted the fight to come off as near Doncaster as possible, where he was better known amongst the young bloods and sporting gentry. Money makes the mare to go, and Castleton's patronage brought Ben Caunt into more prominence than his fistic performances had done so far.

But Bendigo had a backing of the best-known sportsmen in the Midlands behind him, and he trained on the Mersey with Sam Turner and Peter Taylor, old Jem Ward driving over every day to see how things were progressing.

Young Langan acted as one of Bendigo's sparring partners, but Molyneux, the Black, went into the opposite camp.

Buck Castleton had been advised that the "Morocco Prince," as young Molyneux was called, would be a better man to smarten Ben Caunt up even than Young Dutch Sam.

"I've had the mittens on with him myself," Castleton said, "and it's no good anybody telling me that he can use his daddles like Bendigo. But he's the biggest man I've ever seen in the ring, and none of the bruisers I've put at him yet could mill him."

"Then I'll train him to beat Massa Bendigo," Molyneux said, flashing his ivories, and as there was

money to be made out of it, he meant to be as good as his word.

The fight was fixed for early in April, and Castleton got his conditions. Doncaster was to be the starting-point—the ring to be pitched as near the little racing town as possible. The Duke of Limbs and the leading men of the Nottingham Fancy visited Bendigo on the Mersey, and were satisfied with the way he shaped.

“Egad!” said Joe Whitaker, “the only fault I have to find is that I wish the fight had been fixed later on for the Leger week, instead of this treacherous weather. Then we should have had a double event, with the sun a probable starter.”

As it was, a biting wind blew with frequent and depressing rain, but Bendigo was in such high spirits, and so well trained that he did not feel the east wind, even on the top of the Doncaster coach.

Jem Ward picked the White Swan, a pleasant little tavern, on the Selby road, for their headquarters. Ben Caunt’s party was staying nearer to Doncaster, with Molyneux in charge.

“That nigger knows all the tricks of the trade. We shall have to watch his manœuvres pretty close,” said Jem Ward. The old Black Diamond did not put much faith in Molyneux, and as it was doubtful until the last moment who would be the referee, he naturally felt that Bendigo’s entourage ought to be alive to his interests.

On the day before the fight, coaches began to rattle into Doncaster. The Londoners came by the Glasgow mail, and put up at the old coaching inns, getting the best quarters before the Midlanders arrived. All the inns upon the road were soon crowded and their yards full of conveyances.

From the windows of the White Swan they saw

Buck Castleton's swell friends arrive in style, and Ridsdale's party drive past displaying Ben Caunt's colors, which were orange with a blue border. The weather was still cold and cloudy. April had, so far, not been prodigal with its sunshine, and every outburst was promptly quenched by a shower.

"You'll want your shoes well spiked," the Duke said to Bendigo, when he arrived with a contingent of the Nottingham Fancy in drags, gigs, and phaetons, all flying the blue birdseye. "The turf will be wet and slippery."

"I've brought him a pair of well-spiked shoes from Liverpool," said Jem Ward.

These were tied up in a blue birdseye handkerchief and given over to Bendigo. After a consultation, the ropes and stakes were sent down the Selby road, a good spot having been selected for the ring. A crowd had gathered round, and were watching the stakes being driven in, when a magistrate rode up with several county police on horseback. He ordered the men who were at work to withdraw the stakes at once, and move off, or he would have them all arrested for a breach of the peace.

A new move was made and Bendigo called out: "Who's got my fighting shoes?"

"I have," Young Langan said, walking beside him.

"All right, you look after them. The grass is too slippery for boots without spikes."

Buck Castleton heard what was said, and whispered something to Molyneux about the spiked shoes. Then he slipped a tenner across to the black, who displayed his box of dominoes in a broad smile.

The police watched them about, but one of them, more sporting than the magistrate, dropped a hint to Jem Ward that was acted upon. He thought they

would do better on the other side of the river. So they crossed a stone bridge for Selby, and set off over the fields again. As they pitched the ring in a pasture, red hunting coats began to flicker over a fence on the top field. The huntsmen padded their nags down the slope of grass, and being more interested in the fight than in the fox, stopped to see it.

"Where are your fighting shoes?" Jem Ward asked Bendigo.

"I gave them to Charley Langan to carry."

"Where's Young Langan?" Bendy's seconds asked. But he could not be found, and he did not turn up at the ringside all through the fight.

Bendigo made light of his loss, and he began to cut capers in a pair of unspiked shoes. He was in fine fettle, but so was Ben Caunt, big as a bear, standing head and shoulders above Bendy, who tried to badger him by his old tricks as soon as the mill started. But Caunt, who had Molyneux and Ben Butler as his seconds, would not be drawn. Bendy landed the first blow, a stinger over the eye. Ben did not hit back, but threw out his huge arms and tried to choke the breath out of his wily adversary. But Bendy eluded him, and dropped to the turf. In the second round Ben started milling, but Bendy nailed him with a teaser on the mouth, which fetched first blood, and set the Nottingham "Lambs" round the ring cheering for Bendigo. Jem Ward and the Duke were offering 6 to 4 on him, and not finding takers, for by this time Buck Castleton and Ridsdale had as much money out as they cared to gamble.

Molyneux had instructed Ben Caunt to rely on his superior strength and weight, and if an opportunity came his way, to work Bendy against the ropes and stakes and crush the fight out of him. But Bendigo was

much too quick and clever for his lumbering opponent in the early rounds. His hitting astonished even his supporters, his bony fists played havoc with Ben's capacious face and bat-like ears, and although the Hucknall giant threw his weight about and fell upon him once or twice, Bendy came up to the scratch grinning.

Up to the 31st round, by ducking, dodging, and dropping, Bendy had entirely baffled Big Ben, who had received a dreadful gruel. The fact that he could not retaliate on his slippery adversary maddened him. He suddenly flung out his arms, seized Bendigo, and carrying him over to the ropes, thrust him against the heavy stakes and held him there with his fingers knotted round his throat.

"Let him go, you big ugly toad. Do you call that fighting?" called out some of the Nottingham ring-siders.

But Ben Caunt meant to finish the fight and Bendigo at the same time. Bendy's breath rattled in his wind-pipe, his face was going black, and a thin trickle of blood came from his ears. "Cut the ropes or our man will be killed!" the Duke demanded, and the umpires ordered the ropes to be cut.

The storm of protest turned to quick action on the part of the Nottingham Fancy. Clashed knives were opened with a snap, and the ropes against which Ben Caunt was suffocating Bendigo were hacked from the stakes by his indignant supporters. Bendy fell backwards, and Caunt let go of his throat in time to save himself from being struck down by bludgeons, for some of the "Lambs" who had brought knobbed sticks with them were trying to reach him and aiming blows at his head.

The ringkeepers kept them back by slashing at them with long whips, and Caunt was protected by his seconds, who had rushed to his rescue. By the rules of the old prize ring his hugging tactics were fair and permissible. But furious resentment had been aroused by them, and the scene round the ring beggars description. Panting for breath, and his features livid, Bendigo was carried into his corner by his seconds, and not even his own backers dared hope that he would be able to resume the fight. The irate Duke of Limbs stood at the open ring and offered to fight Ben Caunt himself if Bendigo could not come to the scratch.

Buck Castleton, Jack Ridsdale, and his friends, however, saw the turn of the tide, and cheered Ben Caunt in his corner, which roused more ire on the part of the Nottingham men, who booed the swells from London. Molyneux was hopping about through it all as if the fight was already won, and Ben Caunt grinned on his second's knees, whilst his mutilated visage was receiving attention from the bottleholder's sponge and towel.

Bendigo's seconds were working hard on him all the time, and the splendid condition into which he had been trained enabled them to put him on his legs again. He was pale and weak, and he walked feebly to the scratch, but the storm of cheers that greeted the blue birdseye seemed to put new life into him.

He was understood to say that "the big chuckle-head would not catch him napping again." The ring was broken, for the seconds had failed to get the ropes repaired, and some of the ringkeepers were using their whips to keep the crowd out. The fight had to be resumed with the ropes down at one end, but that did not matter so long as the ring was kept clear. Still, there

was a very hostile feeling towards Ben Caunt on the part of the Nottingham "Lambs," who would not be appeased. It died down somewhat, however, as Bendigo returned to his old form and even surpassed himself. Nothing had ever been seen in the ring like Bendigo's recovery. His hitting was tremendous. He knocked Ben Caunt to pieces, and dismay spread among the Hucknall giant's London supporters. But Molyneux was watching all along for an opening and it came.

Bendy milled his man round after round, and only Caunt's powerful physique enabled him to endure the gruelling he took. But in the 75th round Bendy slipped on the trodden turf owing to his shoes being unspiked, and fell full length, just as he was dodging one of Ben's bear-like attempts to grapple with him.

Molyneux immediately claimed the fight on a foul. He flashed his ivories and jabbered away as if he had the rules of the ring at his finger ends. Bendigo had dropped to avoid punishment, and the battle would have to be given to Ben Caunt on a foul.

Buck Castleton and the London swells took their cue from the vociferous nigger, and joined the argument. The parley stopped the fight, and Molyneux was already half-way towards gaining his object. The referee was inclined to be influenced by any party that could shout the hardest, for ever since the ropes had been cut, and the knobsticks appeared to be coming into play, he had wished himself well off the ground.

His bias lay in one direction and that was the quickest way home. The fight had already gone fifty rounds too far for him. He seized the opportunity of bringing it to a close. It looked as if Molyneux's ruse of claiming on a foul was anticipated, for the Hucknall party, including Mr. Ridsdale, backed him up, and overcome

by the clamor, the referee awarded Ben Caunt the fight, declaring that Bendigo had fallen without a blow.

Molyneux threw his hat up into the air and shouted in glee.

"Ben Caunt wins! Massa Bendigo is beaten!"

The affair had been so one-sided, that Bendigo's supporters could not make their voices heard until it was too late, but when they understood what had happened, they raised pandemonium. The Duke, who had been too far off to grasp the niceties of the situation, hung over the ropes, with his quizzing-glass in his eye and demanded that the referee should reconsider his decision.

"What is in dispute?" he asked.

"Nothing, sah," Molyneux grinned with nimble nigger craft. "The gem'man has given the fight to Ben Caunt. There's no argument about it, sah, dat is the gem'man's ruling. Massa Bendigo fell without a blow."

"What the devil have you to do with it?" stormed Joe Whitaker. "I'm talking to the referee. Our man slipped because he had no spikes in his shoes. There's no question about dropping without a blow. Ben Caunt hasn't hit him once in the last six rounds."

"I have given my decision, sir," the referee declared, finding he had a firm backing at the ropes behind him, "and both sides must abide by it. Bendigo loses the battle on a foul."

"Then, by Gad, sir, it's disgraceful," spluttered the Duke. "I never knew such an amazing decision in my life."

"What's it all about?" Bendigo asked, still stalling off Ben Caunt, whom he had expected to dash at him, any moment, but Caunt was suddenly hurried into the

corner by his seconds and slapped on the back by his supporters who could reach over the ropes.

The Duke explained the situation to Bendigo, who seemed dazed. Then came the bleating of the Nottingham "Lambs." It is impossible to describe the scene which followed. Buck Castleton's swell friends were tipping the crowd a Tom and Jerry chaunt when the "Lambs" broke loose.

They swore that Ben Caunt should not get off the field in a condition to boast of his victory. As a matter of fact, he was scarcely in such a condition now, his face having been hacked to ribbons by Bendy's biting knuckles.

The exultant but precautions Castleton had one thought for Ben Caunt and two for himself.

"By Jove! they are threatening the fellow's life. Let's get him away in my carriage," he said, preparing to move off at the first opportunity.

The buck's carriage was waiting close to the ring, and under a bodyguard, without waiting to dress, Ben Caunt was hurried off of it, Castleton and some of his friends following.

"What about the colors?" one of his seconds said.

"Damned if you shall have the colors," Bendigo cried. He fetched the blue birdseye and the orange fogle down together, and waved them as if in triumph over his head.

"When he wants them, let him come and fight me for them, not slink away like a whipped cur."

But Ben Caunt was not allowed to depart in peace. The carriage was besieged by a crowd of the Nottingham Fancy, who demanded that he should get out of it and fight Bendigo to a fair finish. But, of course, his supporters would not hear of such a thing, and Ben

himself showed no inclination to get out of the carriage, and so the "Lambs" dragged him out of it.

His bodyguard was reinforced, and the "Lambs" were driven back to some distance.

Then Ben Caunt was helped on horseback, still stripped to the waist, and told to ride for his life over the fields, smash through a fence, and seek shelter at the first inn on the road. And so the victor escaped from the field of battle.

CHAPTER XXX

A GRAY-HEADED GENTLEMAN ARRIVES AT THE RINGSIDE

THE Nottingham Fancy had every reason for being downcast. They had backed Bendigo with confidence, and most of them had lost much more than they could afford. Jem Ward and the Duke, for example, were badly hit. But they took it like sportsmen, and showed that loss of money did not mean loss of confidence in their man by standing on each side of Bendigo in the ring and declaring they were ready to back him again against Ben Caunt or any other man in England. The opinion generally expressed was that the fight had been filched from Bendy, and he was as popular as ever.

"I'll give you £20 for the colors," someone said at the ringside.

"I'll not sell them for £50, or double that," Bendigo declared. Looking round he saw that the bargainer was one of Molyneux's men who stood side by side with the grinning negro at the ropes. Little doubt the money offered belonged to Buck Castleton, who would give anything to come into possession of the colors.

"If the blackamoor wants them let him stand up for 'em," Bendigo retorted. "I'll fight Molyneux or anybody else in the same ring that Ben Caunt's run away from."

As he spoke a tall gray man came up to the ringside at a great pace and offered to put up the stakes for Bendigo against Molyneux or any other pugilist present who fancied he had a chance and could find sup-

porters. The late arrival was none other than Mr. John Gully, M.P.

"I saw nothing of the fight," he said, "owing to the coach breaking down on the road, but I've heard about it. I've lost over it, too, Matt Robinson laying odds for me. But I am satisfied from what I have heard and can see for myself that the best man did not win."

"The judge gave Massa Caunt the verdict, sah," Molyneux grinned, flashing his box of dominoes.

"Come into the ring and fight for the colors," Bendigo taunted, springing over the ropes like a cat.

But Molyneux declined the offer and drew back.

"I came to second Massa Caunt, not to fight Massa Bendigo."

"You stayed at the ropes to get the colors for Buck Castleton, and you don't care what you pay for them, as it's his money you're handling," the Duke said, shaking his malacca cane angrily at the negro.

"Throw him in the ring and make him fight Bendy," growled the "Lambs," gathering round the ropes again.

But Joe Whitaker saw that it had gone far enough.

"Egad! I'm the Duke of Limbs not the Duke of Lambs," he declared. "Stop bleating and take it like sportsmen. I've lost more than you have. Jem Ward's lost a good bit, too. This gentleman is Mr. John Gully who fought Hen Pearce the 'Game Chicken,' and from what Matt Robinson tells me he's lost more than all of us put together."

"I've lost £500," Gully said, flickering his grim smile, "and I did not see anything of the fight for my money. But I stand ready here by the ropes and stake to back Bendigo for another £500 against the only man who has any fair claim on the championship belt, if

Jem Ward has decided to give it up. I mean Deaf Burke when he comes back from America."

Cheers for the Deaf 'Un rent the air. Jem Burke was still the darling of the English prize ring, as he deserved to be on his record.

"The Deaf 'Un for my money," Matt Robinson exclaimed.

"Bendigo for mine," said old Jem Ward. "I've lost a bit, as the Duke says, but I'm still ready to back Bendigo."

"And so am I," Joe Whitaker declared with most of the Midlanders solid behind him.

The Nottingham "Lambs" gave such a loud cheer they scared a cawing black cloud of feathers out of a neighboring rookery.

"There's enough black floating about to make a suit of mourning for Ben Caunt," laughed Bill Atkinson, the fighting "snip."

"Begad, Molyneux's followed Ben Caunt's example and gone off as well," came from the Duke, as he pointed with his malacca cane to the absconding negro.

Molyneux was running up the field for his life, keeping close to the hedgeside.

"Let him go," the Duke added contemptuously. "It's not the first time he has run away. I expect he's anxious to join Buck Castleton. Whatever else they say, it cannot be denied that Bendigo has kept the colors even if he's lost the fight."

"I'll add the championship belt to them," Jem Ward announced. "It's a prize most of the young 'uns covet naturally enough. I've made up my mind to retire from the ring, so let them fight for it. But for my own part I'd much sooner see a turn-up between Bendigo and Deaf Burke than another battle

with this big chawbacon, Ben Caunt, who is no match for Bendigo either with his fists, or with his headpiece."

"I'll stand by you and your protégé, Jem," said John Gully. "When Bendigo fights again he will find me a ready backer, whether his opponent is Deaf Burke or Ben Caunt."

"Will you have the colors, Mr. Gully?" Bendigo asked, holding them out. "I'll give them to you to save until Ben Caunt can make a better claim to them than running away on horseback."

"Nay, my lad," laughed the tall, gray man. "Keep the colors for your sweetheart. I'm wearing a blue birdseye in your favor, as you see, and I shall spread the truth about the fight like a newsletter at Tom Spring's and Jem Burn's when I am up in London. Castleton and that dirty nigger will have told another tale, and it may easily be that they will be backed up by the sporting scribes, who are not above picking up a few guineas. But Castleton will find me blunt enough, and if Joe Whitaker would like his malacca cane laid across the buck's shoulders I'm the man to do it. It looks heavier than a riding whip."

It was a good thing for his peace of mind that Jack Ridsdale had left the ringside where a squabble was going on about debts and settlements.

"I'd rather the cane was in my own hand when it came into contact with Buck Castleton," the Duke said drily, "and if I had him to myself I should be no more particular than my old schoolmaster was as to what portion of him I castigated. A man who will not fire a pistol in an affair of honor has none to defend."

They shouldered their way to where the traps and gigs were waiting, and drove off to Doncaster,

Bendigo being cheered by the crowd as they passed as if he were the victor.

Buck Castleton's party had been beforehand with the news at Doncaster, and spread it about that Bendigo had met with a crushing defeat and had nearly been killed by Ben Caunt. Bendy turned cartwheels in the street outside their inn and grinned.

"Do I look as if I had been badly milled? When Ben Caunt shows his face at Doncaster you'll have summat to look at. It's as foul as the referee's decision was."

A number of Matt Robinson's Yorkshire "tykes" declared that Bendy would have been an easy victor if the fight had gone to a finish, but Buck Castleton had had his say first, and backed it up by cracking champagne for his party, and giving free drinks at the inn he patronized, so it was not easy to dispel the effects of the story.

He and the swells with him, after drawing their winnings, had set off in a post chaise to London, Castleton's object being to do Bendigo's reputation as much harm as he could at Jem Burn's house in the Haymarket.

John Gully remained thoughtful and grim of countenance over refreshments at the inn, and, saying he had immediate business in London, hired the fastest post chaise that could be obtained in a town noted for coaching and horseflesh.

Molyneux held high revel at the Hawk Arms, Doncaster, with Ben Caunt's supporters, making lavish use of the money with which Buck Castleton had supplied him. And no doubt Langan was well paid by the black as he handed a pair of spiked shoes over to him.

"Better take 'em back and tell Bendigo you lost your way," the nigger grinned. But Langan said he

would see him somewhere else first, for the man who took back the shoes that lost the fight could depend on a warm reception by Bendigo and his supporters.

The Duke acted as Bendigo's penman to his mother, and between them they concocted a letter to explain things, which the Duke took with him to Nottingham. For another challenge had been issued to Ben Caunt, and Bendigo had decided to go to Liverpool with Jem Ward until something came of it.

Joe Whitaker was rather mistrustful of his visit to Mrs. Thompson, knowing what a virago she was when aroused. But it was the bold thing to do, for had he entrusted it to the mail she might have been bitterly disappointed by distorted accounts of the battle. As it was, when the Squire of Ramsdale brought the letter, she set a mug of ale before him, and asked him to tell her what was in it before she broke the seal.

The Duke hummed and hawed a bit before he complied, but he put a bold face on the matter and told her the outcome of the fight. Mrs. Thompson had searched for and found her spectacles, but seemed disinclined to put them across her indignant nose. Suddenly she made up her mind, and throwing the unopened letter into the fire, held it down with the poker until it was charred to ashes.

Joe Whitaker was aghast at this ruthless treatment of the letter which had taken so long to draw up, and in the penmanship of which he had some pride.

"I don't want to read none of Bendigo's excuses," she said. "If he's lost the feight, he's lost it. But if Ben Caunt was knocked about as you say, and had to run away on a hoss without the colors, it worn't much to brag about. What Bendigo's got to do now is to stop at Liverpool until he's beat Deaf Burke for the belt. I won't have him come to Nottingham a

defeated man. He's never been beat in his life, only this once, and that worn't a fair feight. Where are the colors, Duke? I'd like to have a look at them before you take them away with you to Ramsdale House."

Joe Whitaker was as much flurried as he was relieved at the way Bendigo's mother had received the news of her son's defeat. Wondering for the moment if he had the colors on him he commenced searching his capacious pockets and not finding them realized that they had been left behind at Doncaster in Bendigo's keeping.

"'Pon my word I must have forgotten them in my hurry to catch the coach," he explained, "but later on Bendy will no doubt send them to you, ma'am."

"Ay, he'll do that, Duke," Mrs. Thompson said proudly. "He's a good son, and he'll send me the colors although he's lost the feight as you say. I'll have 'em put out of the window at the Lion and Unicorn. The bonnie blue birdseye for ever!"

CHAPTER XXXI

BENDIGO LOSES CHERRY RIBBONS

BUCK CASTLETON and his friends arrived in London in a fashionable barouche with outriders and a liveried groom cantering behind on a white horse in the best style of that paragon of the Turf and the old coaching road, Colonel Mellish, whose eccentricities Castleton tried not unsuccessfully to imitate. A single glance informed even the uninitiated that they were swells returning from a "mill" in the country. And hard on the heels and wheels of these highfliers, in an inconspicuous turn-out, except for its excellent post horses and the pace at which it travelled, followed Mr. John Gully, M.P.

As the barouche turned up Windmill Street the flourish of a post-horn prepared the Queen's Head for what was coming. They pulled up at Jem Burn's house, displaying Ben Caunt's colors with a blue birds-eye torn to pieces underneath them.

Cherry Bibbons turned white when she knew that Bendigo had been defeated, but it was only a momentary change of color. There was an impulse of freedom surging in her heart, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

Buck Castleton burst in with the colors in his hand. "Bendigo's beaten," he told her across the bar. "He simply had no chance against the big country lout, Ben Caunt, and took a hiding like a whipped cur. His supporters have had to pay dearly for their folly and it was a great day for the fly coves. Bendigo will not be wanted again at the Gentlemen's Sparring Club after to-day's disreputable performance."

He held up the familiar blue birdseye muddled and torn under Ben Caunt's bright orange fogle with its blue border.

He drew close enough to Cherry Ribbons to whisper, "These trophies are to deck your uncle's parlor, and these jewels are to bedeck you, my little gypsy."

She made no attempt to repulse him as he thrust into her unresisting hand the casket of jewels she had renounced. Zillah's impulsive act of renunciation had never ceased troubling her, and now she had Buck Castleton's jewellery back again, she was elated rather than dejected at Bendy's having lost the fight. . . .

She smiled on Buck Castleton, and he passed into the parlor triumphant, knowing that he had won his brown-skinned charmer back again and that Bendigo had lost her for ever. The news that Bendy had been easily defeated by Ben Caunt came as a shock and a surprise to Jem Burn. He had fancied his chances, and he would have liked him back at the Gentlemen's Sparring Club, but the patronage of his swell customers had to be considered before any personal likes or dislikes. And Bendigo went out of favor among the habitués of the Queen's Head when Buck Castleton hung up the canary and birdseye fogles over the mantelpiece and described how Bendy had come to grief at Doncaster.

"A man who comes such a dashed cropper at a country fence is no dashed good for the London Fancy," drawled the Marquis of Waterford.

"I suppose the 'Deaf 'Un' could make hay of this big countryman, Ben Caunt?" Lord Caledon asked.

"Oh, easily," laughed Buck Castleton. "He's half hay already, which is to say he's stuffed with straw. He's as big as a haystack and throws his arms about

like the whipples of a flail. His ears stick out like wind-mill sails."

Being in high good humor Castleton caricatured Ben Caunt for the entertainment of the swells, and described the battle in detail over bottles of fizz, some of the sporting writers taking notes for their newspapers. Deaf Burke was known to be on his way back from America and the talk now was who would meet him for the belt since Jem Ward's protégé appeared to have been disposed of, and Caunt was not in the championship class according to Castleton's own admission.

The toffs in his parlor were all Deaf Burke's supporters, and as there was money in making the Queen's Head the Deaf 'Un's headquarters, Jem Burn said no more about Bendigo until he saw the jewels his niece was wearing in the bar. She had been up to her room and put them on to the best advantage before a mirror.

Jem blinked at her in the bar.

"So you're flashing Buck Castleton's jewels again," he said. "What about Bendigo? I thought you had promised to be his sweetheart."

"Oh, that's all over," Cherry Ribbons laughed. "I said I'd be his sweetheart if he won at Doncaster. He lost me when he lost the fight."

Jem said nothing in reply, but in his own mind he was considerably relieved at the unexpected turn of events. He did not altogether like the pretty niece's flirtation with Buck Castleton, but after all he was the associate of sporting noblemen and one of their best customers.

When Jem returned to the parlor another gentleman of importance in the sporting world stood gazing at the colors over the mantelpiece—a gray-headed man wearing a gray beaver hat which nearly touched the

ceiling. His figure and the way he carried himself made him the most conspicuous man in the room, which at the time was full of notables.

He turned derisively from the mantelpiece and faced Buck Castleton squarely. "Those are not the fighting fogles from Doncaster," he said sharply. "Someone has been guilty of an imposition. I was at the ringside a little late in the day, but after Ben Caunt had got away on horseback, and Bendigo had the colors in his hand. Your man, Molyneux, had just offered him £50 for them, which he refused to take."

Castleton quailed under the scathing gaze of the gray-headed old sportsman who glowered at him half-contemptuously and half vindictively.

"I understood they were the correct colors," he stammered. "A man brought them to the Hawk Arms at Doncaster. He said he had pulled them down from the stakes himself and as I had backed Ben Caunt I might like to have them. So I gave him a fiver for the fogles. Young Dutch Sam was with me and he's in the room now. Who was he, Sam?"

"A milling cove named Langan," Dutch Sam answered, blowing a cloud from his clay pipe.

"He didn't offer you Bendigo's spiked shoes in at the bargain, did he?" Gully asked, his hard eyes flickering. "He lost the fight through losing his footing. If the man who carried his shoes had turned up the result would have been different."

"But by your own admission you did not see the fight, Mr. Gully," Castleton said ironically.

"No, but I saw the muddy state of the ground, and I saw the colors still in the ring when you were well on the way to Doncaster. More than that I am ready to back Bendigo at 2 to 1 in hundreds against Ben Caunt or any other man you can bring forward."

"Is that addressed to Castleton in particular, or to the company present?" asked Lord Longford from his corner.

"It's an open offer," Gully responded.

The Marquis of Waterford adjusted his eyeglass with the languid air of an elegant of the Fancy.

"But I say, Gully, do your odds stand good in hundreds against the Deaf 'Un when he sets foot on English soil again?"

"Certainly."

"Then egad! I'll take you on."

"So will I," echoed Lord Longford.

"Here's another customer for you, Gully," exclaimed Lord Caledon. "Is there any limit to the money you're giving away?"

John Gully's grim mouth twitched.

"I never give money away," he said, "and I seldom lose it. But if you gentlemen feel so sure of Deaf Burke beating Bendigo it will obviously be to your interest to see that they meet for the championship. I think I can promise you that Jem Ward's belt will go to the winner."

He pencilled the bets down but curtly refused to have any dealings with Castleton.

"I don't bet with any man who can be guilty of such a trick as that," he said, pointing at the colors over the mantelpiece.

His impulse was to tear them down and he stepped forward.

Buck Castleton turned sallow and clenched his hands. "Damn you, if it wasn't for your age, John Gully, I'd"

Jem Burn and Young Dutch Sam picked him up between them. . . .

"That's the only man I've hit with my fists since I fought Bob Gregson for the second time," Gully said grimly. "If he can get up I'm ready for him again."

To judge by the way he knocked him down Gully would have been more than a match for Buck Castleton in spite of his gray hairs. He stood calmly awaiting his onslaught. But the buck was in no condition to carry on hostilities, and the aristocratic Corinthians stood between them saying this was neither the time nor place for such a fracas.

John Gully lowered his hands but not his uplifted head. "Castleton knows his remedy," he said, "and he also knows where I am to be found. If any one of you gentlemen wishes to reconsider a bet he has made with me, I am ready to cancel it."

There was no response, and with a dignified bow to the company the unruffled but irascible old sportsman passed out of Jem Burn's parlor.

CHAPTER XXXII

BY SPECIAL LICENCE

BUCK CASTLETON was a bear with a sore head now; he pulled himself together by muttering oaths and threats.

"My dear fellow, you're like a badly shaken bottle of port—thick and groggy at present," Lord Longford said smoothly, "but you'll never get Gully to walk out with you. He took Osbaldeston's bullet through his beaver and fired his own pistol in the air. Besides he's a gray-haired old gentleman with a bad temper."

"Oh damn his gray hair," snarled Castleton.

"Exactly, and his temper, too, if that will afford you any consolation. But my dear Castleton, you showed no respect to either John Gully's gray hairs or his gray hat. I saw it stiffen on his gray head when you threatened him, and, if I may say so without hurting your dignity, you disregarded our presence and your own personal safety. You—well to put it plainly, you lost your temper."

The retort was too obvious. Castleton glared at Longford out of a puffed-up eye and snarled through a cut lip.

"What the deuce are you talking about. Didn't Gully lose his?"

"I have known John Gully many years now," his unruffled lordship continued in a tone of mild protest, "and I never knew him to lose his temper. I have never met him yet without his bristling gray hat on and his equally bristling temper. Indeed one might advance a theory that the hat expresses what is going on inside the head."

A laugh relieved the oppressive atmosphere, but Buck Castleton's aristocratic tormentor had not done with him yet—"You should never threaten to knock a man down, and especially a man of John Gully's reputation," he went on in a tone of light banter which had an elegant waspishness about it. "I must repeat Castleton, that you showed little or no respect to the present company by the way you conducted yourself."

They wondered if there was going to be another fracas, and Jem Burn was so alarmed that with a mottled travesty of a white face he pleaded: "For heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't let this go any further. It will ruin my house."

"Give me leave to instruct Castleton a little on the art of making enemies. Never threaten to knock a man down in future, Castleton. Knock him down by all means, but don't threaten him. It's not gentlemanly. Now I have not the same objections to duelling that Gully has."

Buck Castleton perceived the air was charged with more than flickering sarcasm.

"Does your lordship wish to badger me into a quarrel?" he asked.

Lord Longford stiffened into a steeliness that almost flashed. "I want to know, Castleton, whether those fogles are the true fighting colors from the stakes at Doncaster, or whether we have all been imposed upon?"

"I bought them at the ringside as the true colors," Castleton stammered.

The hesitation in his voice was sufficient to condemn him.

"John Gully denies they are the fogles, and I have never known him put his back to a lie. Are they or are they not the colors set up at the stakes for Bendigo and Ben Caunt?"

"All I can say is that Caunt won the fight and I brought them here in good faith."

"You are not so sure as you were about them, Castleton, and I don't think we can accept them as the correct thing, so with your permission I'll pull them down."

Lord Longford tore them off the wall over the mantelpiece and threw them contemptuously at Buck Castleton's feet.

They all waited in tense silence for what was inevitable. But Castleton had no intention of calling his lordship out on such a flimsy pretence.

"If I have been duped, I'm sorry," he said, "but anyhow I will obtain the actual colors and have them set up in place of these within the next few days. Does that satisfy your lordship?"

"If it satisfies you I have no more to say," Longford answered briefly and turned his back on Castleton.

When Young Molyneux came up by coach, Buck Castleton's first inquiry was for the colors. The black said he had tried all he knew to obtain them, but after pulling them down from the stakes Bendigo had tied them round his waist.

"He offered them to Mr. Gully, sah," said the negro, "but the ole gem'man told him to make a present of them to his sweetheart."

"Begad! he might do that," Castleton thought.

According to Molyneux, Bendigo was wearing the colors when he got into Jem Ward's trap and they turned into the stream of vehicles which were taking the Liverpool Fancy home, heavy in heart and light in pocket. The idea came in Castleton's mind that if Cherry Ribbons could be persuaded to write a coaxing letter to Liverpool, Bendigo might be fool enough to send the colors to her as a keepsake. Then the

genuine fogles could be thrown across Jem Burn's parlor mantelpiece for John Gully to feast his eyes on and it would be fine sport to see the gray old badger badgered in his turn as well as to see Bendigo brought into derision and disgrace at the Queen's Head.

When the buck next visited that sporting sign he began to think his brain had tricked his eyes. For Cherry Ribbons was waiting for him with Bendigo's blue spots in a loose loop around her neck.

"What the deuce are you wearing that belcher for?" he demanded.

"I've got Ben Caunt's yellow fogle as well if you like it better," she laughed. "The mail coachman brought me the colors from Liverpool. Bendigo sent them tied together as a little present. He said he lost the fight unfairly and I might like the colors as a keepsake until he met Caunt again and knocked his chucklehead off his shoulders."

"I'll give you a hundred pounds for the two fogles, Gypsy."

"I'll not take it. Molyneux offered me that the moment he set eyes on them. But I knew his buyer and preferred to make a bargain with you myself. Who'll buy my pretty spotted blue and orange-yellow fogles? Here's fine silk belchers for the Fancy as worn by the two Midland milling coves in their great fight at Doncaster. Who'll buy?"

Buck-Castleton doubled his bid.

"I'll not take it," she mocked. "Don't forget these colors came from Doncaster where we first met on the race course. I was dwelling on the moor in a gypsy caravan. You fought Bendigo for me there and lost. Are you going to lose me again?"

The seams of the race-course conflict stood out livid in Castleton's bloated face.

"Do I buy you as well as the colors, Gypsy?"

"If you'll pay the price I'm asking."

"Well, what is it?"

"A carriage and pair and a wedding ring."

There was a teasing witchery about her beauty; her complexion was still sufficiently sunburned to be gypsyish, but as she swept the spotted blue silk from her bosom her neck gleamed white as any London woman's. But she was born for a gypsy tent and a ring of straw, and that thought in some incoherent form must have been in Buck Castleton's mind, for he answered:

"You're putting a good value on yourself, my dear."

"Is the price too high?" Cherry Ribbons smiled, flashing bold eyes at him.

"Begad, Gypsy, you're blood, if it's only the stock of the heathside," he said admiringly.

The withdrawal of Bendigo's fighting fogle displayed a diamond necklace sparkling underneath it.

"See! I wear your jewels prettily, Captain Castleton. I should wear your ring handsomely," she pouted. "But perhaps you don't fancy yourself as a gypsy chal? Then I'll go back to Bendigo and wear his blue birdseye instead of your diamonds."

"Go and put on your prettiest dress, my dear, whilst I arrange for our wedding by special license. I'll come for you in a coach and four! . . ."

The coach was full of pugilists and Corinthians when he set out from the Queen's Head, Jem Burn being dressed in a fine claret-colored coat with silver buttons and knee breeches. He had forgotten Bendigo in his pride that his wayward niece was now making such a good match of it.

When they drove back after the ceremony Zillah had Buck Castleton's ring upon her finger, while, tool-

ing the coach and four from the box seat, he carried the fighting colors on his whip.

Upon reaching the inn parlor, Castleton hung the colors over the mantelpiece in a fine spread.

"John Gully's got what he wanted now, damn him," he sneered, mocking and mocked at, for Cherry Ribbons glanced at her golden wedding ring and smiled to herself.

If Zillah expected to cause the nine day's wonder that the lovely Miss Musgrave had done by her romantic wedding she was disappointed. For Castleton was thought little more of than any flash cove in a frilled shirt, who only counted as long as his money went from hand to hand. But she had her hour of triumph, and the champagne corks flew in all directions at the Queen's Head after their return from the wedding. As each cork popped out of the ten-shilling bottle Jem Burn was well recompensed for wearing his bob-tailed coat with silver buttons and knee breeches in his own parlor. He had never entertained so many swells at one gathering since he kept the sign.

Some well-wisher tied a white satin slipper to the back of Buck Castleton's phaeton which was brought from an adjoining mews. Before Castleton drove away a sporting wag fetched a horsewhip from the stable and going out by the yard tied its lash to the back spring of the phaeton close to the satin slipper. This exploit, watched from the window, precious nigh choked Jem Burn, who declared it was the richest joke in the ceremony.

"There'll be a pretty bit o' sparring between them two before they've been married long," he predicted. "She'll want to walk her way in satin shoes, and he'll want her to go his way wi' a horsewhip, and Lord knows what'll come of it."

After which he went about picking up the corks to see how much champagne had been let off. . . .

At no great distance from the Queen's Head the laughter and pointing of passers-by fetched Castleton off the box seat, "What the devil's this?" he said, throwing back the whip and the shoe into the phaeton.

The horsewhip made Zillah think of Bendigo and the night she had attempted to elope. The white satin shoe made her wish she had possessed a pair of them to wear at the wedding. How much more fashionable she would have looked.

"The inference seems to be that I shall need a whip to keep you in order," Castleton said brutally.

Zillah picked them both up and pitched them into the road.

"I'm ready to follow them if you're not satisfied with your bargain," she said sullenly.

Castleton made no reply, but when he drove on he lashed the horses unmercifully.

"He would like to lay his whip about me," she thought. "I might as well have married a gypsy chal as Buck Castleton"

So the pretty bit of sparring commenced even earlier than Jem Burn anticipated, and one of those unexpected turns by which the irony of circumstances is sometimes pleased to synchronize events took all the shine out of the colors spread over the Queen's Head mantelpiece almost at the same moment.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DEAF BURKE'S CHALLENGE

THIS unexpected event was nothing more or less than the arrival of a coach outside the tavern. It pulled up at the identical spot vacated by Captain Castleton's phaeton. But it occupied more room and was considerably more uproarious in its approach than he had been in his departure. For Deaf Burke sat on the top of the coach and his return was heralded by Lord Longford blaring a post-horn and Young Dutch Sam unfurling Deaf 'Un's fighting fogle to the breeze.

There sat Deaf Burke looking as brown as a berry and fit as a fiddle, his freckled, pugnacious, and humorous face grinning cheerfully, his blue eyes full of devilry, his close-cropped, knuckle-breaking "nob" bobbing to all and sundry as Corinthians came to the windows with their quizzing-glasses and casual customers to the doors with Jem Burn's pewter.

For a moment all the wind was taken out of the sails of Windmill Street by the unexpectedness of the Deaf 'Un's return, but the next there was a cheering multitude round the coach and Burke was half helped, half carried into Jem Burn's parlor.

His first remark was an echo of Buck Castleton's on discovering the shoe and whip at the back of him.

"Here whats the deuces is them?" Burke asked in his peculiar jargon, pointing at the colors spread across the mantelpiece.

"Why Jem, they're Bendigo and Ben Caunt's fighting fogles," mine host answered, not altogether at his ease.

"And whos the deuces is Bendigos and Ben Caunts?" asked the contemptuous Deaf 'Un, although he must have known well enough, having travelled by stage-coach from Liverpool. "Take 'ems downs before I spits on 'ems. Here Dutch Sams, put ups Jem Burke's old colors. I'm the champions of Englands and nobody's else's colors comes before mines. Us won't have its!"

Burke tore the fogles down as he spoke and trampled them underfoot on the sanded floor.

"I echo the Deaf 'Un's sentiments," said Lord Longford. "Fetch out all the fizz you've got in the house, Jem. The gentlemen present are going to drink at my invitation to Deaf Burke, the champion of England."

Deaf Burke's challenge to all whom it might concern was set forth as follows by the free and easy quill of a sporting scribe:

"When I was in Yorkshire, I heard a good deal about 'would-be champions,' challenging any man in England. While the cat's away the mice will play, and then the little fry took advantage of my absence to bounce and crow like cocks in the gutter. I hastened back to take the shine out of these braggadocios, and to put their pretensions to the test. I beg to state that I am now ready to fight any man in England for from £100 to £500, and as my old friend, Jem Ward, has retired from the ring, if he will add his champion's belt to the prize and let the best man wear it, he will give new energies to the ring, and I trust afford an opportunity for deciding the long-contested question, who is champion of England? I bar neither country nor color, age nor dimensions, and whether it be the Goliath Caunt or his hardy antagonist Bendigo, or any other man who ever wore a head, I am his cus-

tomers and no mistake. My money is ready at Jem Burn's, the Queen's Head, Queen's Head Court, Windmill Street, Haymarket, at a moment's notice, but I will not consent to a less deposit than £25 at starting. If I find the race of old English boxers of the right kidney is extinct, I shall go back to America, where an honest man need never want a friend or a battle."

As will be seen, by the irony of fate or something else, Burke's bit of swagger was written and dated from Jem Burn's house, and the headquarters of the Gentlemen's Sparring Club.

The London sporting newspaper which contained it was not long in reaching Liverpool. The quill of the sporting scribe must have been drawn from a green goose for he had contrived to impart sufficient venom into it to rankle the Midland Fancy. The words of the challenge spread abroad like a cloud of vicious gnats, when Jem Ward read the newspaper aloud, as was his habit, in the parlor of his Liverpool public house. The cloud of smoke blown by his cronies and customers provided a mild antidote to the gnat bites, but Jem's churchwarden pipe had been laid aside and disregarded. So the gnats bit him good and hard.

"Well, I'm dashed," growled old Jem. "Deaf Burke's the cock o' the walk, in his own estimation, and if his London backers are as free with their money as they are with their sauce he'll be backed by the Bank of England. He's thought fit to call me his old friend and say I've retired from the ring—me, the only man who has any right to call himself the champion of England. It's the man who wears the belt he wants to talk to, not the man who wears a head and a sauce-box like Deaf Burke."

"You're a-getting on, Jem," one of his customers

ventured. "Surely you won't chuck your castor into the ring again at your comfortable time o' life."

"If a man claims my belt without so much as asking me for it he's got to take it off me," Jem Ward declared, getting as red in the comb as his waistcoat, which expanded with wrath. "I'll fight Deaf Burke for the belt and beat him—by God! so I will."

This vehement flame-up of the old champion did not kindle so much enthusiasm as might have been expected. His customers were hard-headed north countrymen, pledged to support Bendigo to a man.

"This is a rum go, Jem," one of them said.

"According to the London newspaper the Deaf 'Un throws out his challenge to Ben Caunt before Bendigo."

Jem followed it up with the stem of his churchwarden.

"There's nothing in that. He speaks of them both in the same breath. It's first come, first served."

"What does he call Bendy? His 'hard-hitting antagonist,' did ye say?"

But Jem Ward did not answer. He had seen something else in the newspaper disturbing to his peace of mind. The old champion shook his graying head gloomily.

"They've got the colors of the Doncaster fight in Jem Burn's parlor," he said, glancing at Bendigo out of the corner of his eye. "At least they had until they was pulled down and Deaf Burke's put up in their place as an open challenge."

"What, Bendigo's and Ben Caunt's fogles?" clamored his listeners. "How did they get them?"

"It's money makes the mare go, my lads," said Jem Ward meaningly. "They was presented to the Queen's Head by Buck Castleton on the day he got married to a brown charmer who belongs to the Rom-

any Rye. Castleton must have paid a long price for 'em I expect."

He looked across at Bendigo as he delivered this unexpected blow over the heart.

"Bring me a mug of ale, Bendy," Jem Ward demanded. His hand did not shake as he set it down and the ale wore its full head of froth.

"He'll do." Jem Ward decided and said aloud, "It seems to me you young 'uns is too cocksure about who's going to be the champion of England. 'When the cat's away the mice will play,' as Deaf Burke truly says. I shall have to go up to London and do a bit of mousing on my own account. There's the belt in that glass case over there and here's the man who holds it. You've got to beat this to get that, my noble sportsman."

With the green waxed stem of his long clay pipe Jem pointed from himself to the belt hanging on the wall in a glass case.

"I tell you what, Mr. Ward," Bendigo laughed, "you have a go at Ben Caunt instead of me. He's nowt but a great big beer barrel, and the only belt that'll ever go around him is a cooper's hoop."

"Maybe you'll think more about your blue spots than Cherry Ribbons, now, my lad," old Jem said not unkindly when they were alone. "Now that gypsy wench has married Buck Castleton and made a laughing-stock of you, I mean."

"I never was much else by nature, Mr. Ward," Bendigo grinned.

When the Duke of Limbs read the sporting newspaper aloud to the Nottingham Fancy, his great voice made the vital part of Deaf Burke's challenge resound like a clap of thunder which the subsequent hammering

of pewter pots on tables and forms rolled round the room.

"Bendy will beat the Deaf 'Un under an hour," Joe Whitaker declared. "John Gully's betting alone will make the match. I'll go and see what the sporting gentry have to say about it at the Flying Horse and Feathers."

It being market day, Joe Whitaker knew that he would meet a select assortment of country sportsmen at these market-place inns, where he was well known and looked out for. As he was mounting his horse, Bendigo's mother came running up the street to him.

"I've heard the Deaf 'Un's back from America and wants to fight my Bendigo."

"That's true, ma'am. The challenge is out in *Bell's Life*." He shook the sporting newspaper from the saddle.

"Glory be, Squire! But what about Ben Caunt?"

"He's challenged Ben as well. Burke say's he's the man for either of 'em."

"That's all Dutch daffy! But let him feight the big bletherer from dirty Hucknall first and when he's put Ben Caunt to grass Bendy will make hay of the Deaf 'Un. I'd like to be in at the haymaking."

"I'd like to see you there, ma'am. But they'd be more shillings than guineas out on Ben Caunt against the Deaf 'Un and precious few of either. If his Hucknall supporters can scrape their savings together and make a purse up, Ben Caunt's got the first claims on the crooked verdict that a dirty nigger twisted out of the white-livered referee at Doncaster."

"Him feight the Deaf 'Un!" Mrs. Thompson snorted. "Why he feights wi' flails, not fisses, and the jolly young waterman would smash his ribs in like rotten palings. I can hear 'em cracking and ripping."

"Egad! I think Bendy hammered his ribs as hard as Deaf Burke is likely to. The man's a windmill and goes on till the wind's knocked out of his sails. All we want now, ma'am, is Deaf Burke inside the ropes to make Bendigo champion of England."

"Glory be! 'Tis nothing but the truth you speak, Duke," cried Bendigo's mother, and went down the street singing a ballad of the old prize ring.

The next Liverpool mail-coach that arrived in London carried an express letter from Jem Ward accepting Deaf Burke's challenge on behalf of Bendigo, and offering to make a deposit of £25 in earnest of the match. Acting for the Nottingham Fancy, the Duke of Limbs penned a similar reply to the challenge, which he would not entrust to the ordinary mail but paid an old coachman handsomely to deliver into the hands of Jem Burn at the Queen's Head. The coach set out at seven o'clock in the morning, and even at that early hour Joe Whitaker was airing himself outside the coaching inn to impress upon the driver the importance of his undertaking.

"I've got your letter in my hat, sir," said the driver, showing it tucked in the lining of his white hat.

"Begad, that won't do," ejaculated the Duke. "Your hat might blow off."

"No fear of that sir," said the coachee, cocking it at a jaunty angle. "Being behind very superior horse-flesh, sir, and me the very best whip on the road, I think I can answer for it that my head's swelled big enough to keep my hat on."

The Duke laughed at the sally, and felt satisfied that he had got the right man for a letter carrier.

Still nothing came of the Duke's letter, and after waiting impatiently an unreasonable time for an answer he tried to get another fight on with Ben Caunt,

but the Hucknall man's supporters hung fire. Jack Ridsdale was unforgiving and unapproachable, whilst Ben Butler declared that both he and his "nevy" had had enough of Bendigo and neither wanted to see him nor his money again. Thereupon the Duke bristled and throwing off his elegant blue driving coat, set his gray beaver astride of it like a terrier pup on guard, and wanted to fight Ben Caunt himself on the green at the back of the Coach and Six.

The apologetic Ben Butler had some difficulty in smoothing the Duke down, and his blue coat was ruffled up the back when he put it on again.

On the following day the Duke's astounded eyeglass saw in a sporting newspaper that Deaf Burke and Bendigo were matched for a side-stake of £100 to meet at an early date.

The next morning a bulky gentleman with curry-combed side whiskers climbed on the box seat of the coach for Liverpool. The Duke in a caustic mood had decided to go to Liverpool and ask Jem Ward what the devil he meant by fixing up a fight without consulting him or letting him know. But the open air mellowed him, and the friendly coachman being easily persuaded to let him drive over a long stretch of road put him in high good humor before they reached Liverpool, for no man loved more to be behind trotting horses and feel the twirl of the ribbons.

When he burst into the Black Diamond's chaffing crib at the York Hotel, where well-to-do gentlemen of the Liverpool Fancy were blowing a cloud, he took up the doorway and quizzed in and out of the tobacco smoke.

Bendigo, loaded with mugs and glasses, bobbed to the Duke.

"Egad! What are you doing, my lad? Have you turned the blue birdseye into a dishwipe?"

Jem Ward winked over his glass of sherry. "As he can't get a fight, I'm making use of him as potman."

"Can't get a fight! But dammit, Mr. Ward, I saw in *Bell's Life* that he and Deaf Burke were in training."

"So they ought to be. But you'll see in next week's issue that the Deaf 'Un's paid forfeit, and been mighty long-winded about it, too. I wrote to you when the match was made."

"Begad! then the letter would be one of a batch that never reached their owners owing to a country mail bag being lost on the way. If the letter had been sent to the care of Mr. Jephson I should doubtless have received it."

The Duke was soon in a place of honor amid the thick of the tobacco smoke as Corinthian arbiter of Jem Ward's parlor.

According to Jem's version of the matter, at first Deaf Burke had seemed as ready as the money at the back of him. The Deaf 'Un declared "Bendigos is justs the mans for me to start ons. God helps him when I gets him in the ropes."

Bendigo raised a laugh by mimicking the Deaf 'Un. "And after talkings likes thats he backs out of its. Us won't have its. Will us, Duke?"

"Egad! my lad, you're going a bit too far," the Duke cautioned him, but his eyeglass twinkled. "What's the matter with the Deaf 'Un, Jem?"

"Drink and seeing flash life with such Lushingtonian swells as the Marquis of Waterford and Buck Castleton. I kept as far away as I could from lush cribs when I was a young man although I keep one now."

"You ain't an old 'un yet, Jem, although you've put it on lately," said one of the Fancy.

"Put what on?" Jem asked stiffly. "I'll put 'em on with you or any other man in the room, for that matter."

"Egad! not with me," said the Duke in mock terror. "There's Izzy Lazarus over there," said Bendigo. "He was to have trained me against the Deaf 'Un. Make him earn his money, Mr. Ward."

"My lad, I'll make you earn yours," said Jem Ward grimly. "Just to be sociable, we'll entertain the company with a bit of sparring."

The Duke clapped his great hands gleefully and said that would be worth coming to Liverpool to see. Jem seemed determined to show some of them that the hands that had beaten Dick Acton, Phil Sampson, Tom Cannon, Jack Carter, and Simon Byrne had lost none of their cunning. It was a brilliant set-to, for Jem Ward was pretty well a paragon of perfection with the gloves, and he gave a faultless exhibition.

But the boxing ring had seldom seen such "a getting upstairs" as Bendigo gave the champion with his tricky headwork. Bendy's head was seldom where Jem Ward expected it to be, and all the time his evasive features seemed to be grinning at the gloves as he kept cheating and tricking them by ducking on both sides, and taking into consideration Bendigo's cleverness, those who stood by declared that the old Black Diamond would take a lot of deposing from the championship.

On his part Jem said aside to the Duke—"Bendy takes more hitting than any man I've ever stood up against, but, mind you, I could mill him with the mawlies."

"Egad! that's not it, Jem. Can he mill the Deaf 'Un is the point and I'm going to settle it."

"How?"

"To-morrow I shall take Bendigo to London, and try to badger Deaf Burke into sparring at something more pugnacious than swing doors."

"If you can get them in the ring and Bendigo wins, I'm ready to relinquish the belt on a certain condition which I'll talk to you about when the right time comes."

"Then we'll try our best. The belt isn't going begging if I can help it."

When Bendigo came up the Duke said—"My lad, you've got your marching orders. We go to London to-morrow morning. I can always get good accommodation at the Piazza Hotel, Covent Garden, so we'll put up there. I wouldn't think of staying anywhere else, although at night you can hear the fiddles of the Royal Italian Opera House squeaking like cats on the roof. Egad! when the moony season of cats and fiddles is on, I'll bet my Sunday beaver that you couldn't tell one from the other."

CHAPTER XXXIV

IRATE CONDUCT OF THE DUKE'S MALACCA CANE

THE Duke was vigorously brushing his side whiskers before a pier-glass at the Piazza Hotel.

"We're up too early for London, my lad," he growled. "What damned weather! Look at the drizzle on the window."

The London gray outside was already diffusing itself in a pearly mist, and Bendigo said the sun would soon be shining on a proper country day.

"Egad! I've pomaded my eyeglass," laughed the Duke, after going to the window to see for himself what the prospects were. "I must have got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning. Wrong side, begad! I should like to know which is the right side. Give me a roomy four-poster that a man can sleep on. They're frizzling eggs and bacon below, and when the smell of cooking comes upstairs and knocks on the door it entirely spoils my appetite." In proof of which, after he had dressed himself up like a duke of the period, he ate such a breakfast that it became the talk of the Piazza Hotel for weeks afterwards.

"And now," said the Duke, resplendent in his blue coat, sprigged waistcoat, buckskin breeches, top boots, and beaver hat—"and now"—with a flourish of his highly polished malacca cane—"now let us take a walk to see my old friend Tom Cribb, in the Hay-market."

The Duke led the way through narrow lanes, without sidewalks, posts and chain dividing the cobblestones, and as they turned into the Strand a swell in a natty

Stanhope gig without a groom gave them a generous sprinkling of mud from wheels which were of an extraordinary spider pattern.

"Why the devil aren't you more careful, sir?" bellowed the Duke, with an irate flourish of his walking stick. "Egad! I'm spattered up. And why the devil don't you look after your harness or bring a groom with you? Your crupper straps are hanging down."

The swell drew up and got out of the Stanhope to inspect the harness. Evidently he was more interested in the information conveyed by the Duke respecting its incorrectness than intimidated by the irascible malacca cane.

"Damme, the fellow ought to be in leading strings," Joe Whitaker growled.

"That's Lord Lavender, the swell who gave me the snuff-box for spoiling his frilled shirt at Doncaster," Bendigo said.

"Egad! Is it?" said the Duke, popping up his eyeglass.

"His lordship prides himself on being one of the best whips in England. We mustn't rub a fashionable Corinthian up the wrong way, my lad, although the mud from his new-fangled wheels is of no better quality than from a costermonger's barrow. Still, I suppose I had better make myself agreeable to him."

"Spattered you up a little, did I?" said the swell languidly. "That's the fault of the dirty roadway. What a spider wheel picks up it throws off again."

"Yes, but egad! You've devastated my new coat, and——"

"Oh, confound your coat," said his lordship, as the horse figgeted. "It's a wonder I've not been stood on my head. Come over here and look at these buckles and straps."

The nap was off the Duke's temper as well as his coat. His handsome whiskers bristled.

"Dammit, sir! Isn't it sufficient for your idiotic wheels to spatter a gentleman's coat with mud without taking him for a London ostler? Why, in my shire, sir, I'd as soon make you swallow a bullet as—as a poached egg."

The Duke was so furious he seized on the first simile that presented itself. Although somewhat lacking in dignity, savoring a little too much of the early breakfast table, it tickled Lord Lavender's sense of humor.

"The one's as digestible as the other the way they poach them nowadays," he laughed.

The Duke strode up, thrusting a hand deep in his coat pocket, and, drawing half of a silver-plated pistol out of it. Perceiving now that he had a furious and somewhat pompous gentleman to deal with Lord Lavender expostulated:

"For heaven's sake, sir, be good enough not to add to my embarrassments. I'm short of money, and I'm short of time, and where have I seen your man before?"

"Doncaster races, sir," Bendigo said respectfully. "At the Reindeer."

"Why, of course, you're Bendigo, the fellow who knocked me down during the fracas between Gully and Castleton. I've been half inclined ever since to put my money on you against the Deaf 'Un."

"You couldn't put your money in a better place than you've put your mud," spluttered the Duke.

"I see you've both got a sprinkling, for which I am heartily sorry."

"Say no more about it. Egad! I was a little hasty myself."

"And I inexcusably, or perhaps excusably, brusque since that bright spark, Young Dutch Sam, has been

having a frolic with my harness. Whilst I warmed my nose over a cup of coffee, laced up with cognac he played one of his practical jokes off on me. Young Dutch Sam is one of the most mischievous devils in town. He's undone up the kicking straps, and if this tit had been a bit of blood instead of hired from the mews a spanking new turn-out might have been turned into matchwood."

The Duke quizzed through his glass.

"Allow me to know something about harness, sir," he said, adjusting strap after strap. "At a pinch, I am not above being my own stableman, or any good sportsman's, for that matter. I was groom and guard to Jack Mytton when he drove the Tally Ho! coach from York to Doncaster, dropping two outsides in the road, and shaking the window out. Egad! What a drive that was! Every time he sprung the horses he nearly sprung the coach off its wheels."

"You're an old coachman, sir?" his lordship asked, showing new interest in the Duke.

Bendigo was aghast, and expected one of his backer's bright pistols to pop out of his blue coat again. But apparently he did not resent the remark. In fact, it might be said, he took it genially, and enlarged upon the subject of coaches and horses. Bendigo could not help thinking that the Duke was too confidential to such a sporting sprig of the aristocracy as Lord Laven-der, for he made open confession that he, Joseph Whitaker, esquire, of Ramsdale House, on Nottingham forest, had during his younger days driven a mail-coach on the public highway through a severe winter with straw round his legs, his whiskers bristling with icicles, and his whip so frozen and congealed that he could not crack it until he had thawed it at an inn fire. After which the pair of them showed such an increased

affability and mutual geniality towards each other, that Bendigo came to the conclusion they must both belong to the same Buffalo Lodge. They were soon exchanging snuff-boxes, and the flash of jewels on the Duke's mull made such a sharp contrast with the plain pinchbeck on Lord Lavender's snuff-box that Bendigo blinked.

"I seem to recognize that trinket," said his lordship thoughtfully, and colored up in confusion.

"You do, sir," said the Duke. "It was given me by Bendigo, who, I believe, had it from your lordship at Doncaster."

"I remember now. It was after the Sellinger Cup. I'd made a pile of money on the race. Never had such luck before and never had any since."

Lord Lavender's eyes went to the snuff-box in a regretful glance, the look of a man who, having disposed of something he prized, sees it with momentary embarrassment in the possession of another.

"Sir," said the Duke of Limbs, "if you will exchange your present snuff-box for this elegant bauble I shall be more than gratified. I have been uneasy from the first in its ownership. What may be one man's heirloom is another man's encumbrance. Being a plain, old-fashioned country squire, I dislike having diamonds twinkle under my nose, as they draw instant attention to its increasing rubicundity. Come, sir, exchange with me."

"I—couldn't think of it," Lord Lavender stammered.

But the Duke, with exquisite ill manners, deliberately snatched the pinchbeck snuff-box out of his lordship's hand and restored the jewelled one with what, under the circumstances, will surely pass as a courtly bow.

Lord Lavender was too much a man of breeding

and sentiment to spoil such a delicate situation—which showed a shocking lack of gentility on the Duke's part—by refusing to accept the coveted snuff-box. He pocketed it and his scruples together. But his eyes, which were blue of color and boyish in outlook, seemed to have gathered some of the moisture from the morning mist.

"I esteem this as great a favor as any man has done me," he said. "Do me still another by letting me book you as outsides on the Enterprise coach which I am matched to drive from London to Bagshot tomorrow morning against Captain Castleton on the Quicksilver. The distance is about twenty-six miles by short mail stages over the old heath roads with a velvety finish. The changes of horses are at Hounslow and Bedfont Gate, where Castleton is nursing four blood chestnuts which I am told will make a laughingstock of the roan mailers I shall put in there. But, begad! Whitaker, I've got to take the road from him or become bankrupt stock. We start at eight-thirty sharp from the White Horse Cellar."

Up went the Duke's eyeglass.

"To speak of 'Captain' Castleton, sir, is to give him a rank which he does not deserve and ought never to have held. 'Buck' may suit him better, but in my opinion the man is best described as a damned black-guard."

"Why, there you seem to be of the same opinion as John Gully, who is booked as one of my outsides," laughed his lordship. "Castleton only concerns me as regards his coaching ability. It is his habit to gibe at the seasoned old whips in glazed hats and shabby coats who could teach him more than he knows in one stage. In what I can only suppose was a moment of exaltation he insisted that the cattle counted for more than the driver, and that he had done prodigious

things on the box seat. I took the liberty to doubt that he could tool a mail-coach on a well-used road at a faster pace than ordinary mailers could attain, whatever cattle he put in. He was backed to do it by his Lushingtonian friend, the Marquis of Waterford, and as that sporting nobleman would hear of no less a figure than a thousand guineas the match had to be made at that high price. So you see what's at the end of the Bagshot road. If I lose, a thousand guineas will leave me like a crack of the whip. But we won't dwell on that aspect of the affair. I have still a couple of seats left, Mr. Whitaker, and I heartily place them at the service of you and your man."

The Duke gave a meditative scrub at his off-side whisker, hummed, and fetched his watch from his fob ornamented with a formidable "bunch of onions" consisting of keys and seals.

"Whilst fully appreciating your lordship's kind invitation," he said, "I hesitate about accepting it. Time is the enemy for one thing. For another we only arrived in London by last night's coach after an infernally long journey, and if I followed my own inclination and cut into the day like a game pie to suit my appetite, it might be disastrous to our main object, which is to match Bendigo against Deaf Burke."

"You will never have a better opportunity of making the match, for Burke will be one of Castleton's outsides in company with his Corinthian backers. But I won't conceal it from you that one of the two coaches is as likely as not to be turned over at the finish of the stretch of road between."

"The match will be fought out on the last lap. We shall change cattle at Bedfont Gate and drive hell for leather to Bagshot."

"Oh, egad! If that's the case I wouldn't miss it

for anything," the Duke chuckled. So it was arranged that they should be at the White Horse Cellar in good time for the setting-out of the coaches and, mounting his Stanhope, Lord Lavender gave them a jaunty flourish of his whip.

No sooner had the spider-wheeled vehicle vanished than Joseph Whitaker became a victim to doubts and temporary despondency. Careless of the increasing traffic he stood in the Strand as stiff as its traditional maypole and covered himself with opprobrium.

"Fine fellow to look after your interests, I am," he said emphasizing his fatuity by using the pepper-box between his phraseology. "Fine stew we're in. Here's a nice kettle of fish. I didn't bring you to London to break your damned neck on a coach, my lad. What will they say about it at the Flying Horse and Feathers, and the Lion and Unicorn? I can see Bill Atkinson making funeral suits for all your bereaved backers and singing 'Who killed Cock Robin?' 'till the tears run down his goose. Oh! damme, I ought not to have let Lord Lavender talk me over."

"If the Deaf 'Un can play cock-a-hoop on a coach, so can I," Bendigo. grinned. "Besides Buck Castleton's coach will be the one to turn over, not ours."

The Duke polished his eyeglass and brightened up perceptibly as he stood and surveyed the Strand.

"Egad! That's as likely to happen as it is comforting to contemplate. And now, as a pup of the blue birdseye, you must be introduced to two of the old bulldogs who wore it before you cut your teeth. Come along, my lad. I'll take you to see Tom Cribb in his parlor at the Union Arms, and Tom Spring at the Castle Tavern in Holborn."

CHAPTER XXXV

HIGHWAYMEN OVER THE HEATH

THE Duke awakened the Piazza Hotel betimes next morning with a stentorian "Tally Ho!"

"My lad, we must set forth on shank's pony for the White Horse Cellar," he told Bendigo. "There's time for a grilled bone if they make haste about it. An old stage-coachman would prefer a deviled kidney. Give me a grilled bone to start on the road with and a cup of black coffee, and egad! a touch of cognac in it."

Which was exactly what the Duke did start on the road with, and but for the long country walks taken when in training, Bendigo could never have made his pace to the White Horse Cellar. The coaches stood outside, and Bendigo caught a good view of Buck Castleton. His face was puffed and wine-shot and he looked badly out of condition. Mr. Gully and Squire Osbaldeston drove up together, and presently the Marquis of Waterford, tooled up in a phaeton which contained Lord Longford and the redoubtable Deaf Burke, the square-set pugnacity of his freckled face relieved by the Irish devilry of his twinkling eyes.

The Duke went over Lord Lavender's Enterprise with an experienced quizzing-glass.

"She's a broad-built coach with a good base and won't swing over easy," he declared.

"Built like a bulldog and goes like a greyhound," Lord Lavender said happily.

"I like the set of the fellies. No patent boxes to the wheels, but sound oaken linch-pins and screw nuts.

He'll not lift one of your wheels, sir. But the coach has been patched up."

"It was used as a mail bullion coach on the Dover road and carried between two and three tons every journey with blunderbus and pistols in the boot. When he converted it into a passenger, the coachmaker put his best work into it and the new part of the coach is better than the old."

"Which is more than can be said of some of the new Corinthians," Joe Whitaker said, staring from Gully to Castleton. "Weighty as we are, we shan't punish your cattle like two tons of bullion. Egad! Though it leaves a man lightly it sits heavy enough."

The Duke insisted on Bendigo's wearing a pair of padded leather driving gloves.

"Everything is slap-up to order, but accidents will happen!" he said. "I can't have you breaking your hands on anything harder than Deaf Burke's nob. You wouldn't be able to do any training for weeks with raw and racked-up knuckles. Mind, there's nothing like parting company with an overturning coach as soon as you conveniently can. She's a sulky vixen and constancy to her will be ill rewarded. If you reach the grass, begad you're on clover and may think yourself lucky. If you're pitched into the road the gloves will save your hands from picking up gravel and sharp bits of flint. Remember your bones aren't your own. You belong to your backers, my lad, lock, stock, and barrel."

"I could turn a cartwheel from the top of the coach into the road," Bendigo grinned. "But what about yourself, Duke?"

"I've fallen off so many vehicles in my time that I have acquired the habit. All flesh is grass, my lad, and being as generously provided with it as any abbot

or squire or knight of the shire I usually contrive to fall on pasture."

The Quicksilver was a new coach, although the name was well known on the road. A dandy new painted coach with a yellow body, spick and span, and well fitted for Buck Castleton to be tooling along the road in a fashionable new rig-out with a white hat of the latest pattern stuck jauntily on his head, a regular mail coachman in a scarlet coat and shining buttons beside him and a bang-up mail guard in scarlet and gold at the back. The word for passengers to get aboard was given and each guard sounded his coach-horn.

"After you, Castleton," Lord Lavender said with Corinthian politeness.

"Here goes then for a thousand guineas," said Castleton, and was off like the wind.

"And now I'm after him," Lord Lavender said when he got his horses going.

Lord Lavender drove to the tune that the road called, and a good tune it was and a gay tune for blowing on a post-horn, and the four-in-hand went gaily along to the lilt of it, and with the wind at the back of it the road came up to them laughing and singing and went by them singing and laughing, as any long reach of English road will in good weather to full-fed men on the top of a coach.

Ay! a good tune it was to ride to.

"Do ye ken John Peel in his coat o' gray?" it sounded like, only a good deal brisker, and a good tune to drive to, for, with the singing and blowing of it in his ears, Lord Lavender sat managing the coach and four with a finger on the pulse of his cattle, and a supple wrist, neither needing nor using a pulling arm. He had

his way by an easy twirl, and never a hard jerk, and the laughter of the road was in his boyish blue eyes.

Castleton's lighter mail-coach and chestnut cattle were flying ahead, but the tootle of their horn reached them and they could make out the impolite flourish of beaver hats. At the top of the first rise the silvery chatter of the bars was music to their ears and as they saw the fine reach of the road the coach seemed to jingle:

"Gay go up and gay go down
The green highways to London town."

"Egad! Next to a sweet bit of turf I love a sweet bit of road," said the Duke to Bendigo, "and here we have it."

And well might he love such a road, for a few miles out of London it was aglow with beauty, a blue sky shining above them, and when Lord Lavender sprung his team they jingled like music.

"All grace and elegance, gents," said the mail guard in an ecstasy of admiration.

"Glorious!" said John Gully, sitting back to let the coach roll the full unction of the word out of him.

"They've got the action of angels," said the Duke of Limbs, his quizzing-glass gleaming out of a capacious but cherubic smile.

"But they're poor devils to look at compared with Castleton's cattle," said one of the aristocratic outsides, "and I hear he's keeping four blood chestnuts at Bedford to go nap on."

"Egad! He's not going to put them into the coach off pasture?" asked the Duke.

"I should say not, sir, but they'll be full of beans."

"Where are we now, Duke?" Bendy asked, as they gave the go-by to a couple of coaches on the Hounslow road.

"Why, my lad, we're approaching Highwayman's Heath and here's one of the turnpike gates the notorious Dick Turpin is said to have jumped on his mare, Black Bess.

"Over highway and byway in rough and smooth weather,
Some thousands of miles did they journey together,
Their couch the same straw and their meal the same mess,
No couple more constant than Dick and Black Bess."

"Bravo! Mr. Whitaker," cried John Gully. "A lusty song and a lusty singer. I prefer a coach-horn to an Italian fiddle."

"Sir, I could hear the cursed things squeak at Covent Garden from the Piazza Hotel. Give me a good hunting catch above all else. Black Bess I honor, but the devil take Dick Turpin and all his crew of rapsallions. I'd sooner see them on the gibbet than in the saddle."

The keeper had run open the turnpike gate to the Quicksilver and they drove through without a stoppage; but he slammed it to on the Enterprise and Lord Lavender had to pull up. The tollkeeper was deaf as a post, or pretended to be, and grumbling that he had been cheated by one gentleman's coach which he took for the Royal Mail, and did not intend to be cheated by another, he held the gate against them until he was appeased by a shower of half-crowns. Still they lost several invaluable minutes and Buck Castleton came in first at the Hounslow posting inn.

Castleton's sobbing cattle were taken out, their hides smoking and showing the whip marks of sabotage. They were done up in a short stage.

"Begad! he's taken it out of them," said the Duke.

"I'd like to give him a damned good hiding," Gully said, standing with clenched hand against the used-up horses.

Lord Lavender's team were a credit to his coachmanship, and could have done another stage in comfort. Both coaches were horsed without the passengers dismounting although drinks were handed up.

The Corinthians on the Quicksilver behaved as if they were already the cock of the road. The Quicksilver was off well in advance, and there was some unnecessary delay in getting ready the *Enterprise*, which seemed to show that Castleton had greased his axles with more than tallow. But none of Lord Lavender's passengers chafed. They knew their man for a sportsman and a gentleman who, barring accidents, would be first in at the journey's end. His lordship did not seem to be thinking of the wager or the coach in front of him.

The road talked to him as it will to any good coachman, and the bars chattered back to it, and he sprung his cattle where the nod of the road told him; so there was such a compensating balance of give and take between them, the music of the bars downhill dying out to tightened traces as the wheelers curtsied, that the back of the opposite slope was broken and the leaders stiffened to take the top of it. So the horses came onto the road again as fresh as daisies, with mouths as cool and responsible as if they carried wisps of new hay instead of snaffles.

But Castleton's cattle sped downhill with silent bars and tight traces and uphill again, fighting their bits and flinging froth abroad, the dead coach hanging on to them by every buckle; while on the road he whipped and tore the heart out of them, mistaking it for speed, until a slip of loose stones or a bit of rotten going under their hoofs would have turned the coach over.

To be on good terms with the old coaching road over the heath, between oak and ash, or with hedge and

ditch running alongside your wheels, you must come to it as lover and friend. Lacking true fellowship with it and its users the road would not sing to you as it did to Lord Lavender. Oak, ash, and elm would just pass you by as posts of dead timber without any more friendliness than a tollgate, and the companions of the road would look at you askance as if you were some highway robber on your way to be turned off in the hangman's cart.

There were regular coachmen on the Hounslow road that resented being given the go-by on their own road by an amateur mail-coach with a swell at the reins and a crowd of exuberant swells on the top. They did not like it and they laid themselves out to impede and embarrass Buck Castleton, who might fume and whip and curse, but he had not the trick of sweeping nonchalantly by a dull and sleepy coach that was winking slyly out of one eye and obstinately disregarding him with the other. But when a merry coach-horn sang out "By your leave and the top of the road to you," the fellowship of the glazed hat let Lord Lavender go by ungrudgingly, and as he went by his lordship raised his whip in salute to the driver.

"Just gone on ahead, sir. Give 'em jip!" was usually shouted after him, at which he caught the lash of his whip in a dexterous gesture.

So they passed the last coach where the road went sweethearting round a honeysuckle corner, and came upon the Quicksilver suddenly, and, almost before Buck Castleton was aware of them, Lord Lavender had slipped by with a lift of his whip and the blare of a post-horn.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TO THE TUNE OF THE "TANTIVY TROT"

AGAIN a cloud of dust rose on the Hounslow turnpike. This time it must be Buck Castleton's coach. "They're here, Jim," one of the ostlers cried, rolling the straw in his mouth. He had been standing outside the White Lion for some time watching the dust picked up and had given several false alarms. But here was the Quicksilver at last. No question about it. For the coach came into Bedfont Gate with springing horses and the flourish of post-horns, and a crowd of horsey men gathered under the gibbet upon which the inn sign was swung and the innkeeper with his watch out of his fob led the cheering.

"You've done it in very good time, sir. Three cheers for the Quicksilver."

"Yes," said Lord Lavender languidly, "but this isn't the Quicksilver. I'm afraid Buck Castleton is a bit behind. Still, if you don't mind us being first in, here we are."

The landlord of the White Lion was thunderstruck, but sporting.

"Well, gentlemen," he stammered, "although the spread out in the parlor was ordered by Captain Castleton, I suppose it's first come, first served."

"Has it been paid for?" asked fiery little Squire Osbaldeston.

"No, sir."

"Then, what the devil are you making a song about? Show us in and bring your bill."

"That's the way to talk to 'em, Duke," said Bendigo, as he followed the broad back of the Duke's

blue coat into the parlor. They had nearly finished their refreshment, when the Quicksilver arrived, and they heard Castleton cursing things in general and the landlord of the White Lion in particular. Castleton's four blood chestnuts were put in, and his load of sporting Corinthians who had come down from the coach for a refresher scrambled up it again, Deaf Burke sitting cock-a-hoop in their midst. The Marquis of Waterford tried to twist the wire off a bottle of champagne, but failed to start the cork.

"Knock its dashed heads offs on mine," said the Deaf 'Un baring his knowledge-box.

Nothing loath, the sporting Marquis nobbed Burke with the bottle. Coming into contact with his hard skull the neck broke and the wine fizzled all over Burke. He caught some of it in his mouth, and the noble spendthrift flung the rest of it, froth and bubble, over Buck Castleton and his boon companions.

"It's a wonder the Marquis doesn't break his neck," somebody said on Lavender's coach.

"It's not so easily broken as that of a champagne bottle," said the sardonic Gully, "although topped by little more than a tinselled cork."

"Castleton's cattle seem impatient," said Osbaldeston.

"So does he—or unnerved."

"Here I say, damn it all, get away from their heads," Buck Castleton raved at the head groom.

"If I do, sir, they'll jump out of their harness."

"Let 'em go—I know what I'm doing. I can hold 'em."

"Let the swell break his neck, Jim," the other man advised, *sotto voce*.

The slash of a whip followed, and the groom lost his temper.

"Sit tight, you fool. Outsides hold on," he yelled, and jumped aside to clear the coach and save being skittled over. The other stableman flicked a rug off. Somebody on the top blared a mail-horn, and that, with the sudden release of the wheeler's heads, did the trick, for the leaders stepped out, and whether he meant to or not, Castleton failed to hold his team. Although he nearly lost several of his passengers, Deaf Burke being a conspicuously insecure outside, Castleton got off first, and there was an immediate outcry from the other coach.

"Gentlemen, let him have every advantage he desires," said Lord Lavender. "I shall now have the pleasure of again taking the road from him."

"That's it, give him the go-by. Cut one of his dashed wheels off," came from the irate lips as Castleton's coach swirled up the dust at an increasing pace and distance.

They mounted the Enterprise. Lord Lavender calmly gathered his driving apron about him, got a firm seat, took his reins to his heart, called to the ostler to "stand clear," and started off on terms of good fellowship with his team, and the road alike.

Buck Castleton thought only of keeping the lead and dashing up with cracking whip to bring his lathered horses to a standstill under the bush and sign-board of the Coachman's Arms at Bagshot; he had no eyes for the fugitive beauty of the road, no ears for the tune it called, no heart for the sigh and whisper and the laughter of it.

But Lord Lavender was responsive to every dimple and smile and mood and gesture of the green highway.

"Damme, it's swimming, sir, it's floating through the air," said Osbaldeston. "Jim's right about grace and elegance. I never saw a man drive with such

finish. Don't know I've got a bone in my body an' I've broken 'em nearly all at fences, an' been ridden over an' rolled on. Begad! we're picking him up now."

"Give 'em the 'Tantivy,' Squire," somebody suggested.

"Better save the 'Tantivy' till we get up with them, and then give him a burster, sir," the guard respectfully advised.

"I think so, too," said Osbaldeston, laying the yard of tin across his knee.

The road glowed with warm sunshine, and thrown about it were the churnings and snafflings of Castleton's folly.

"Egad! All the champagne in his blood chestnuts is wasting to froth like the bottle they broke on the Deaf 'Un's nob," the Duke said to Bendigo.

An eloquently true remark, and all the time the regular mail-coachman sat beside Lord Lavender in an attitude of contented approval. The coach was being driven as he would have driven it himself under the circumstances, neither more nor less. Whilst Castleton's mail driver was so drunk that he actually thought he was driving the coach himself, and kept one eye at a time on the horses, with the reins bunched up in his left hand, as he fondly imagined, in an attitude of professional aloofness that had successfully passed for sobriety on previous occasions.

A country peddler plodding along the highway with pack and blackthorn stick found Castleton's coach upon him as he turned an outgrowth of ash and brambles. He leaped for safety into the hedgeside, cursing the mail guard in scarlet livery for not blowing his horn. Almost before he could catch his breath again came the other coach. But it kept to the crown of the road and

left him enough wayside grass to stand upon, but for his pack which was all awry like his temper.

"Those cursed coaches are driving all honest tradesmen off the road," said the peddler. "Thanks to Puffing Billy I'll live to see the end of 'em."

But at the next roadside inn he was soundly of his old opinion that the new steam carriages would neither blow up or ruin the country. A wagoner only escaped Castleton's mad driving by adopting the same tactics as the peddler and drawing into the hedgeside. Even then it was touch and go. But Nemesis was coming up. It flitted past the wagoner in the form of the Enterprise with Lord Lavender's team going together like well-oiled clockwork.

Castleton had flogged the gloss off the hides and broken the hearts of his blood chestnuts. All the devil had fizzed out of them in froth and sweat; there remained only stumbling uncertainty, aching mouths and burning hides. And behind them came the gallop and jingle of Lord Lavender's roans, fresh as when they were put in. They were coming along at an overtaking pace and the distance between the two coaches shortened as they entered upon the best stretch of road.

"Now for the 'Tantivy,' Squire," Gully said to Osbaldeston.

"Let 'em have it, sir," the guard agreed.

The old Squire resting his yard of tin on Lord Lavender's shoulder said, "We shall be up with them in a jiffy. What are your lordship's intentions?"

"I shall take the road from Castleton and give him the go-by."

"Begad! Yes," bristled Osbaldeston, "and if he disputes it lift his wheel. Damme, sir, lift his wheel or turn him over."

"He'll give way, sir," the ironic Gully commented. "I know the man."

"I'll challenge the road," said the fiery little Squire, putting the mouth of the long post-horn to his own. His mottled red face, puffed and purpled as he blew a loud and challenging "Tantivy," from coach to coach. It swung Castleton half round like a hand on his shoulder. The swagger went out of his face like the crack out of his whip, leaving him with glassy eyes and a loose jaw.

"Well, I'm damned," he stuttered.

"Keep the road and spread your team out," the Marquis of Waterford ordered. "Spread 'em out like a bunch of carrots or Lavender will slip by like a string of onions."

Buck Castleton hesitated.

"Cork 'em up, confound you! If they try it on, drive into 'em and turn 'em over."

Lord Lavender's outsides took up the "Tantivy Trot," and roared it from the top of the coach at the top of their voices.

"Let the steam-pot
Hiss till it's hot,
Give me the speed
Of the Tantivy Trot!"

Every post-horn on both coaches was blaring. Drunken Corinthians on Castleton's coach were roaring, "Tantivy! Tantivy! Tantivy!"

Bendigo was no more fluttered than the blue birds-eye at his neck. He was in the thick of the swells and one of them at heart. A Corinthian! He understood at last what the Duke's favorite toast meant—"Here's to the last hurdle even if you come home on it." He didn't care what happened as long as they beat Buck Castleton.

"Gentlemen, I am afraid I shall have to take the

road from him," Lord Lavender said apologetically. His passengers gave a light-hearted cheer. They were all gamecocks tingling under the careless spur of sport, not a white feather or a patch of goose-flesh amongst them. His lordship's blue eyes sparkled and the laughing, singing road rejoiced that the last of the swell coachmen were as full of mettle as the first. Here was a coach full of amazing fools, some of them elderly, all ready to crack their bones at the crack of the whip. And the men on Buck Castleton's coach were just as willing and more likely, being well-primed with Dutch courage.

"Don't budge, Castleton. Don't give him a dashed inch."

"But—they'll have the wheel off!"

"Damn the wheel! What's a wheel?"

Tantivy! Tantivy! was blown in Buck Castleton's ear from Osbaldeston's post-horn. He lost his nerve and turned in, or tried to turn in.

The coach lurched and rocked.

"Begad we're over," shouted one of the fuddled Corinthians. Castleton tore at the reins. Two of his team only felt the pull. The mouths of his near side leader and wheeler were dead as mutton. But they were half-hearted enough to go the way of things in general under protest. There was a rending noise between the blood chestnuts, an ominous crack and splinter. The pole had gone. But the wheels were off the crown of the road and they carried enough momentum to drag the coach aside. As it rocked on its springs the regular coachman turned sober, opened both eyes together and immediately fell off. As Lord Lavender's coach scraped past with post-horns blowing, the noble sportsmen on top of Castleton's swore like blacks. His lordship trusted to Providence and

his axles. If the scraping wheels had locked they would both have inevitably been over. Not much more than the thickness of a five-shilling piece saved them. At such close quarters there was an intimate exchange of compliments between the load of Corinthians on each coach. Castleton's crew backed up the remarks they fired at his lordship's outsides with actual violence. A bottle was thrown and a whip handle thudded on somebody's beaver.

"Egad! I do believe he's hit Osbaldeston," the Duke chirruped in Bendigo's ear.

"If he has the Squire won't miss him," Bendy grinned undoing his birdseye.

But fortunately the damaged beaver was not on the noddle of the fiery little Squire, and the gentleman who wore it was so full of sporting hilarity that he blew "Tally ho!" on a post-horn and contented himself with the witty remark that one good blow deserved another. Bendigo waved his birdseye, the Duke flourished his white hat and the guard indulged in the pleasantries of attempting to play "The Bay of Biscay" on a key bugle. Castleton's overdriven chestnuts were rearing and quivering with the mail guard in scarlet livery already at their heads. The last they saw of Deaf Burke he was squaring his fists from the top of the coach and inviting "anybodys" to "come ons!"

"Gentlemen, we'll oblige the Deaf 'Un at the end of the journey," said the Duke resuming his ruffled gray beaver.

Osbaldeston pulled a gold hunter out of his fob, and snapped it open.

"Where are we?"

"That's the fourth milestone from Bagshot, sir," said the guard nodding familiarly to it. The old Squire exulted.

"This little run will surprise some of the steam potters who say coaching's dead, and done for. Going to turn 'em all into hearses, are they? What's the best time between here and Bagshot?"

"Black Jack did the four miles in twelve minutes on the old Defiance, sir."

"Let me be sure that I've got the right time."

The guard synchronized his silver watch, which was a dependable old verge of the turnip pattern.

"Quite right, sir. My tattler's timed to a tick and it's running nose to nose with yours."

Osbaldeston kept his watch open until the third milepost came up.

"Lavender will do it under the twelve," he said confidently. "He's on velvet now."

"Tantivy! Tantivy!" went from post-horns from the four corners of the coach.

"Tip us a stave, guard."

In a full-bodied voice the red-coated guard trotted forth:

"Here's to the road, the coach, and its load,
The cattle so swift and so steady;
Stick to the team and blow off your steam
Tantivy! Tantivy! Tantivy!"

And so they came to the Coachman's Arms at Bagshot, in eleven minutes for the last four miles, the fastest time made by any coach on that road.

When Castleton's coach arrived on a spliced pole like a lame duck, there were beavers waving from every door and window of the Coachman's Arms. Lord Lavender tried his best to restrain his exuberant passengers, but they were well warmed with wine and insisted upon "smoking" Buck Castleton. The Marquis of Waterford jumped down followed by Deaf Burke.

"If I had been driving the Quicksilver the devil himself wouldn't have given me the go-by," he said. "You've won your wager, Lavender, and you've shown that a Corthinian can knock up twelve good horses in twenty-odd miles and drop a thousand guineas without losing a wheel or breaking his neck. I didn't think it came within the bounds of possibility, but Castleton's done it. That's over, what's next? Where's Jem Ward's man? Bendigo, I think they call him."

"Egad! He's here, sir," said the Duke of Limbs stepping forward.

"Well, here's the Deaf 'Un. Make it two thousand guineas and let 'em get at it for the championship. We might as well have a full day's sport."

"Egad! sir, this will never do," gasped the astonished Duke of Limbs. "Deaf Burke's a little out of training to judge by the looks of him."

"Whats me?" growled the Deaf 'Un. "Why, damnitalls, gentlemens, I'm as fits as a fiddles. All I wants is to gets insides the ropes again. Then God helps 'em all."

"That's exactly where we want you," said the Duke becoming brisk and business-like. "Last time you paid forfeit to Bendigo and shirked the fight. We've come to London after you, Burke, and if you've still got any backers, let 'em stand up for you now, egad! or forever hold their peace."

"Hark at him," growled the Deaf 'Un. "Talk to this gentlemans, the most nobles, the Markiss of Waterfords."

"As Bendigo's backer I am quite prepared to talk to any gentleman who represents your interests."

"Then why not get at it now," expostulated the noble Marquis.

"Oh, egad! because it must be between ropes and stakes for the championship of England, sir. We must not arrogate to ourselves the right of being the arbiters and exclusive ringsiders in a battle for the belt."

"Egad! admirably put, sir," said the Marquis aping the Duke's imposing manner, but there's no harm in a sporting turn-up for a thousand guineas, egad!"

"Egad! sir, but a thousand guineas is not so easy to find for country gentlemen whose estate consists mainly of rook-shooting and not living among rooks; and egad! again, sir, your man in his present condition would be milled to pieces in ten minutes, whereas put into proper training he may last, egad! once more, sir, say a quarter of an hour, egad!"

The Deaf 'Un's coat was off, and Bendigo stood watching him warily. The Duke had dropped his eyeglass and knuckled his hands ready for what might happen, the Marquis of Waterford having the reputation of being a good man with his mawlies. But on this as on other occasions he showed himself to be more sober than he looked.

"Sir," he said, "I ask you to accept my apologies. I tried to smoke you and was smoked as dry as a haddock in return. As our man has forfeited to you, young man, you shall have the fight on your own terms and in your own country if you like. If you will be accommodating enough to meet me at Jem Burn's to-night we will arrange preliminaries and sign articles while you are in London. Put your coat on Deaf 'Un."

"Whats for?"

"Don't talk back to me or I'll give you a milling. Put your coat on Deaf 'Un. Do you hear me?"

Deaf Burke picked his coat up and put it on, sulkily

putting his tongue out at Bendigo to show that he would sooner have slipped into him than it. The noble lord, pointed the yard of tin he had carried on the coach at the two men with the gesture of a Punch and Judy showman and using it like a tin trumpet at a fair blared out to the crowd of Corinthians—"Gentlemen, on my right I have Deaf Burke and on my left, Bendigo, two good lads who are to be matched for the championship of England. Give them a cheer worthy of the occasion as a battle for the belt has long been in abeyance. Shake hands with Bendigo, Deaf 'Un, and may the best man win!"

The Corinthians were blowing post-horns, cracking whips and shouting hunting cries when Buck Castleton came up scowling, disgraced, and disregarded. They had turned their immediate attention from the cock who could only crow to a couple of gamecocks of the Fancy who would show them some sport for their money.

The London coach came into Nottingham late that night, but as soon as it arrived a gentleman wearing a jaunty beaver and eyeglass knuckled in a daredevil eye made his way down Bunker's Hill, tapping a buck-handled malacca cane over the cobblestones.

Turning down a street named after the Duke of Newcastle, he brushed his way down a dark entry, and after nearly falling over the yard pump, counted the houses with his cane.

"One—two—three—egad! here we are!"

The Duke—who was the only aristocrat to visit the neighborhood despite its ducal associations—rapped repeatedly on the third door with his buck handle. The bedroom window above the third door opened and the Duke's beaver went up as Bendigo's mother put her head out and curtsied to the new moon.

"Who's there?" she inquired none too civilly, for the Duke was as shadowy as the pump.

"Joseph Whitaker, ma'am, with good news for all true blues who sport the birdseye. Your son, ma'am, is matched to fight the Deaf 'Un within thirty miles of Nottingham town."

"Glory be, Duke! He'll beat Deaf Burke and be champion of England like Jem Belcher and Gentleman Jackson and Tom Cribb and Tom Spring."

"So he will, ma'am, and egad! we shall all live to see it if we don't die soon or sudden. Bendigo's gone to Liverpool to train under Jem Ward, Peter Taylor, and Izzy Lazarus."

"Petticoat Lane!" sniffed Mrs. Thompson.

"Out of Petticoat Lane as you say, ma'am, and an un-Christian Jew as you are thinking, but a clever lad with his hands."

"I'm not against him being a Jew, Duke. Dan Mendoza was a Jew and a good miller, but I don't want Petticoat Lane to sport the blue birdseye."

"Don't let that trouble you, ma'am, for to a man they'll wear the Deaf 'Un's colors. Burke will be training at Finchley, near London, under Tommy Roundhead and little Dick Curtis."

"The pet of the Fancy, Duke."

"Ay! so Dickie was, ma'am, once upon a time, but he's not much more than a ringside sparrow picking up half-crowns for crumbs nowadays. And now, ma'am, I'll be going."

"'Tis ill manners to have kept you at the door, Duke. I'd come down and get you a drop o' daffy was there any in the house. An' how will you be getting to Ramsdale at this hour of night?"

"I shan't attempt it till the morning; they will

put me up at the Flying Horse. Good-night to you, ma'am."

"Good-night, Duke, and take your hat off to the moon—it's a new 'un."

"So I will, ma'am, with the greatest of pleasure." The Duke doffed his beaver to the moon.

"An' turn your money over, Duke."

"I'll do that as well, ma'am, in the fullest confidence that the other side will turn their money over when we get Bendy in the ring with the Deaf 'Un."

The malacca cane tapped the cobblestones again, a twirl of it or flourish between the taps, and with the shine of the new moon on his eyeglass the Duke made his way to the Flying Horse.

The Fancy foregathered for the fight at the Red Lion, Appleby, in the Leicestershire country, where the men were to be seen fresh from their training quarters.

John Gully shouldered his way through the throng at the Red Lion in company with a tall, iron-gray man dressed in the fullest fashion.

"Begad! Bendy, here's Mr. Gully with Gentleman Jackson," said the Duke of Limbs.

Deaf Burke was tooled up to the Red Lion in a coach and four full of his backers. A red-nosed man blowing a yard of tin made the inn sign rattle on its hinges.

"Egad!" said the Duke, "what a noise."

"And what a nose, Squire," said Bendigo, looking out of the window, "I thought at first he was blowing it."

"Then it must be Tommy Roundhead, the red light of the London Fancy. He's had Deaf Burke in training at Finchley."

Jem Burn acted as introducer.

"Gentleman," he said impressively, "this is Deaf Burke, the champion of England."

On seeing Jem Ward glaring at him in speechless wrath he wilted.

"I mean, of course, now that Mr. Ward has retired from the ring," stammered Jem Burn.

"You shuts ups," said the Deaf 'Un, in his jargon. "If Jem Wards is champions of Englands vy don't he fights me instead of Bendigos?"

"I'll fight you now," Jem Ward declared beginning to take his coat off.

"You can't do it, Mr. Ward," John Gully interrupted. "The articles are drawn up between Burke and Bendigo."

"Quite right, Mr. Gully," one of the swells flashed wittily. "Try the new jewel, and if he doesn't shine in the ring we'll have our old Jem—the Black Diamond—back again."

"I don't care whose I fights so longs as I fights somebodys," Burke said jauntily. "Gets on with its."

"Egad, we've been waiting for you long enough," the Duke of Limbs rejoined drily. "These are your backers, I presume. Well, gentlemen, I'm Bacchus for the occasion, so what are you drinking?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FIGHT ON HEATHER HILL

HEATHER HILL, a well-selected slope about seven miles from Appleby, was crisp and sparkling in the nip of a wintry morning, and the ropes were stiff with frost when they were put round the posts. Such a flight of highfliers had not gathered round the ropes since Tom Spring and Jack Langan pummelled each other for seventy-two rounds on Worcester race course fifteen years before. The cream of the latter-day Corinthians were on Heather Hill, and the fight was attended by many aristocratic sportsmen who were hunting the counties, particularly the Leicestershire loam. A frost had whitened Warwickshire and Leicestershire in the early morning, and many of the spectators were caped and cloaked, especially those who had come by coach, while not a few flashed hunting pink; having seen the fight they would be ready as soon as they could reach their horses to follow the fox. Hucksters plied their trade round the outer ring selling apples, oranges, nuts, and gingerbread, herb and ginger beer, Eccles cake, etc. An enterprising country publican had followed the fight in a cart with a cask of ale on each side of him. As soon as he drew up on the heathery slope he began to draw and sell the ale, and more hands were soon reached out for mugs than he could supply.

In contrast to the highfliers, or Corinthian ring-siders, was the flock of Nottingham "Lambs" at the ropes of the outer ring—black sheep that were shepherded by gentlemen of the Midland Fancy, who had been served out with silver-mounted whips as well as

the London bruisers. More than a dozen of these whippers-out, or ringkeepers, were in authority ready to crack their long lashes within an inch of the public's nose, and keep the ring clear at any cost.

Fifteen thousand men on Heather Hill were now waiting for the fight. The House of Lords was well represented, a number of noble sportsmen and sporting gentry lounging at the ropes veneering the occasion with the lustre of pedigree and the polish of privilege. As for pugilists—every jolly miller in the country seemed to have turned up to see the set-to. And the hucksters went round shouting, and the clocks went round silently, and the nobs pulled gold watches out of the fobs and said, "Demn it all, you know," with the exquisite ennui of men who had broken their horses' necks to get there, and would soon be breaking them to get away.

Deaf Burke was the first to arrive, and a roar went round the ring at his approach. Cutting his usual capers he seized upon the enormous white beaver hat of his second, Dick Curtis—"the Pet of the Fancy"—and threw it over Corinthian heads into the ring.

"Ajax defyngs the lightnings," he grinned posing in a comical attitude. "So does I chucks my castors into the rings, gentlemens."

His jargon set them all laughing except Dick Curtis. The "Pet" dived through the crowd and ducked under the ropes in quest of his badly treated hat amid a fire of chaff from the fashionables.

Gentlemen Jackson remonstrated with all concerned, however, and the dignity of the occasion was soon restored under the rebuke of the almost traditional arbiter of the old prize ring. A diversion was next caused by the flutter of femininity. Jem Burn was considerably perturbed as he saw his wayward niece being

introduced to Deaf Burke by Buck Castleton. The crowd made audible comments, but Zillah met their stare with haughty eyes, flashing back insolence for impudence. She was fashionably dressed, and a picture of disdainful loveliness. Her only hold on Buck Castleton was her challenging beauty and she knew it. So far he was making the best of his matrimonial bargain.

"She's blood of the heath," he often repeated to himself—"but begad it's Newmarket Heath!"

As one of Deaf Burke's backers he bought his ribbons, and Zillah flaunted them on her bonnet when Bendigo's party drove up.

"Who's the lady?" John Gully inquired.

"Buck Castleton's wife," some one answered.

Up jumped the Duke's quizzing-glass:

"Egad! It's Cherry Ribbons. I must break the news to Bendigo and see how he takes it."

The "Lambs" gave Bendy a frantic reception as he vaulted over the ropes and shook hands with Deaf Burke, whose twinkling eyes and freckled face were puckered up in an expression that would have outdone Grimaldi at Sadlers Wells.

The Duke drew his man into a corner of the ring. "Bendy, your old sweetheart's at the ringside although she's changed her cherry ribbons to Deaf Burke's fighting colors. Alas! that one so fair should be so false and fickle. No doubt she has been brought here for a purpose. If you lose the fight, my lad, it will please her now she's Castleton's wife, and she's here to help you to do it."

"I'm going to win the fight, Squire, for the sake of an older sweetheart than Cherry Ribbons," Bendigo said stolidly—"a bit o' blue silk wi' white spots. She's been my sweetheart ever sin' I can remember, and she's

as true to me to-day as she was when she first put her arms around my neck."

"That's your style, my lad—the bonny blue birds-eye for ever!" cried the Duke unknotting Bendigo's spotted blue belcher.

Jem Ward took this from the Duke as soon as the corners had been tossed for, and assisted by the red-nosed Tommy Roundhead twined it with Deaf Burke's belcher, which was of as many colors as Joseph's coat, and, so entwined, the colors were tied to the middle stake of the ring facing the nobility and gentry.

"It's a rum mixture of colors but we call our fogle London Pride because you can't take it down," Tommy Roundhead said boastfully.

"Mr. Ward will do that when the fight's over," the Duke prognosticated. "How do you find your man, Mr. Roundhead?"

"As strong as a lion, sir, and ready for anything."

"Egad! then we'll serve up the Nottingham Lamb, and mint sauce," chuckled Joe Whitaker.

These amenities were followed by the preliminaries, Gentleman Jackson being easily persuaded to say a few words about the fight as the two men stripped. He spoke with a gentlemanly ease and dignity that did him credit, and was heartily applauded, although the crowd were evidently eager to cut the cackle and get to the fight.

There was nothing between the two men in height but Burke was broader-set, being of such herculean development that he had caused a furore in America when he posed on the stage as Ajax, Samson, the Dying Gladiator, etc. But he lacked the athletic suppleness of Bendigo, and his body had not the healthy glow that suffused the Nottingham man's. They were brought to the scratch by their seconds and a mutual

handshake took place, the conditions of the combat being set forth briefly by the referee, who was interrupted by the ringkeepers cracking their long whips and clearing the outer ring of a few hangers-on, who ducked in and out of the ropes until they could find a place in the crowd. After the confusion had died down, "Time" was called, and the fight commenced, sportsmen setting the new pugilistical rule at defiance by crying the odds—6 to 4 on Deaf Burke. The Deaf 'Un stood square-set in the roped arena awaiting his man, who sparred for an opening in such an unorthodox attitude as to make Gentleman Jackson groan.

He handed his snuff-box to John Gully and commented a little shrewdly on the inelegance of Bendigo's stance.

"Inelegant, I admit," Gully rejoined, "but he'll go to Burke's sneezer like a pinch of top-mill."

"Egad! yes," said the Duke, who stood against Gully. "You'll find our man a tiptop miller, Mr. Jackson. Begad, look at Burke! Ajax defying the lightning, and here comes a bolt from the blue and white spots."

Bendigo landed a blow on the Deaf 'Un's ribs that sounded as if he were clumping leather, the angry mark of his fist being welted on Burke's sallow skin.

"That was a mustard plaster for the Deaf 'Un," John Gully said grimly.

It was sauce to the Lambs, who bleated their approval and waved a hurricane of blue and white spots. Bendigo trod the turf lightly and the lightning began to play upon Ajax like missiles out of a catapult.

"Stops thats, who's throwings stones?" Burke growled, thinking the Lambs were making a cockshy of him from the ropes. When he realized that it was the patter of Bendigo's biting knuckles, he seemed

stupefied instead of infuriated, and showed no eagerness to tackle his "hardy adversary."

"Why don't you fight him, Burke?" the Corinthians called out, disappointed at their man's behavior.

"Wake up, Deaf 'Un! Vats the matters vid you?" demanded his backing of East End publicans, jolly higglers and "pets" of Petticoat Lane.

The fighting blood crept out in leechy veins on Deaf Burke's brows, and, resolving to make short work of the country man, he carried the fight over to the other side of the ropes.

"Now there'll be the dickens of a turn-up," said Gentleman Jackson, quizzing at the scene with an experienced eye. And there was. But Bendigo stood his ground, and it was hit-away-and-slash-away within a yard or two of the ropes until the heathery turf became a wriggling marsh underfoot and their studded fighting boots squelched in the mud. And with all the pugnacity in his squat body, Burke could not work the supple Bendigo against the ropes as he wanted him.

And notch for notch, Bendigo hit him harder and oftener, although the Londoners thought Bendigo's tricky headpiece was receiving dire punishment, and advised the Deaf 'Un to go in and finish him. Burke did his best. At times he used a beautiful straight left and in trying to dodge it Bendy received a right to the jaw which sounded like a crack of a wooden mallet. It set the kettle singing, and he was all abroad now. Knowing he should do no more good until the sponge went over him he closed with Burke and wrestled for a fall. They both took it, and with his cheek against the cool turf, Bendigo had the satisfaction of hearing "the Champions of Englands" blowing like an old man. The Deaf 'Un had bellows to mend already.

"The Dying Gladiator," John Gully said grimly.

And it is an extraordinary thing that the Deaf 'Un took up that pose as he lay upon the ground.

At the scratch again his backers had a shock. His face was badly knocked about, his left ogle puffed up, and all the twinkle taken out of the other. The nap had worn off him, while Bendigo was fresh and strong, his only difference being a swollen jaw.

The betting took Deaf Burke at his face value and changed to even money.

"Damn it all, Deaf 'Un, your stock's going down," jeered Buck Castleton, and added biting taunts which Burke pretended not to hear.

The wind blew keen on Heather Hill, and thousands of muffled-up spectators closed round the ring to warm themselves at the struggle between the ropes. But Deaf Burke had shot his bolt. He was a sick man at the end of the fourth round in which he was thrown heavily. Nips at the brandy bottle helped him along, but they did not help the betting. He had no stomach for the fight, as some of his supporters told him plainly over the ropes. Even the Whitechapel "pets" were hedging, and by the tenth round the betting was 6 to 4 on Bendigo.

The Dutch courage died out of Burke's battered body like a coarse flame, and left him shivering. His one thought was to escape the defeat that awaited him. His bloodshot eyes glittered like red glass as he lowered his bullet head and, turning suddenly, butted Bendigo onto the ropes. Dazed by the impact, Bendigo threw his arms out, caught the ropes, and swayed upon them. With the savagery of an orang-outang Burke butted him again. Bendigo swung limp on the ropes now, which slithered under his arms. But Jem Ward sprang forward claiming the fight on the rule of the ring that "butting with head shall be deemed foul, and the

party resorting to this practice shall be deemed to have lost the battle."

Deaf Burke's action had been too flagrant and deliberate to allow of dispute, and as he stood with his cropped head drooped down he heard the inevitable decision. The fight was given to Bendigo on a foul.

"You cowardly cur!" cried the swells.

"You damned hound!" yelled the lower element of the London Fancy.

But Deaf Burke said nothing. He stood amidst them with his head lowered . . . and he never raised it again in the prize ring. If he had lifted it he would have seen his colors pulled down from the mid-stake and tied round Bendigo's waist, while blue and white spots rippled along the slopes of Heather Hill and cheers for his rival roared round the ropes.

As the Duke led the cheering with his malacca cane, John Gully touched him on the shoulder.

"Castleton isn't taking it so well as his wife," he said.

Joe Whitaker had his quizzing-glass in his eye, and turning about he saw Buck Castleton hanging on to the ropes, six feet of hunched-up despondency. But Cherry Ribbons, on tiptoe with excitement, in the full flush of her beauty, her eyes shining across the ring, was waving a blue silk handkerchief, and through his glass the Duke saw white spots dancing upon it.

"The blue birdseye," he gasped. "Egad! if Castleton looks up he'll see her displaying Bendigo's colors."

"It must be done out of mockery," Gully said against his shoulder.

"Egad! I'm not sure. Women are as odd a mixture as any fighting fogle."

She saw them watching her across the ring. But she did not lower her dark head or her bright bold

eyes. With a defiant, challenging gesture she slipped the spotted blue silk into her bosom and thrust it out of sight. Then with a shrug of disdain she turned to Castleton who appeared half stupefied.

"I was wrong," John Gully said quietly. "She meant it."

The crowd streamed down Heather Hill into the highways and byways. At the turnpike gates along the road people were anxiously awaiting news of the fight, and it was soon spread about all over England that Bendigo had beaten Deaf Burke in the tenth round.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CHAMPION OF ENGLAND

WHAT took John Gully to Liverpool in Jem Ward's gig? It might be conjectured that Gully had no desire to travel along the road in company with London swells who had lost their money to him. But no consideration of that kind counted with the irascible old sportsman. He was never known to alter his plans to please any man other than himself, and it must be, therefore, to please himself that he was undertaking such a long and tiresome journey, for the roads were in bad condition, and the wheels of passing vehicles splashed mud up all the way. Jem Ward could only get along at a jog trot, for both Gully and Whitaker were men of weight.

The traffic from the fight went past them, and raised its whip to Bendigo and Jem Ward with shouts of congratulation on the great win. John Gully and the Duke were not familiar to many of the Liverpool sportsmen, but nevertheless their figureheads compelled almost as much respect as Bendigo's colors.

There were great doings at Jem Ward's house when they reached Liverpool, and what with shaking hands, and what with carrying drinks into the sporting parlor, Bendigo's fist was as much in request as it had been in the ring. And all the time he was wondering when Jem Ward's belt would be turned over to him.

"I bit Deaf Burke's ear for him, didn't I, Mr. Ward?" he grinned, as the evening wore on without any mention of the coveted trophy.

"You did, my lad," Jem cordially agreed, "and in my opinion, you bit it nice and hard."

"It does one good to hear you say that, Mr. Ward. But what about the belt? A champion without a belt is like a mug without a handle to it."

"I'll put a lug on the mug in the morning," Jem promised, and a queer smile passed between John Gully and the Duke. But Bendy could not make head or tail of it.

"Does he mean to give me the belt in the morning?" he inquired of them.

"Egad! he promised to make you a present of the belt, and I don't see how he can get out of it, Bendy," Joe Whitaker declared.

The next morning there was more mystery. Jem Ward fancied he could paint pictures that ought to hang in the Royal Academy, and, truth to tell, he was no mean artist, although some of his later landscapes were better than his early ones. He always mixed his own paints, and went in for thick, bright colors, which made the Fancy approve of Jem's oil paintings, even if the Academy neglected them. The following morning Jem set off with Mr. Gully in his gig to show what he could do in the art line. They had not been gone more than an hour when the Duke made an alarming discovery.

"Egad! the belt's been taken," he said, and fetched Bendy to see that the glass case in which the championship belt was usually exhibited stood empty.

"We'd better go and tell Jem Ward about it. Some of his parlor company may have walked off with it last night."

Fairly nonplussed at the loss of the trophy when he was about to come into possession of it, Bendy borrowed a little turn-out and drove with the Duke in pursuit of Jem Ward's gig. After driving a few miles into the country they came upon the gig standing in a lane.

So they pulled up, and going along a footpath, found Jem Ward painting away under a carriage umbrella—whilst John Gully was standing in his usual erect attitude against an ash plantation.

“We’d better see what he’s doing under the green gingham first,” Joe Whitaker said diplomatically.

Jem Ward was laying thick color on with a palette knife. He had given the old sportsman a green-sprigged waistcoat, a blue coat, a birdseye neckerchief, and a silver-gray beaver, and was putting green paint prodigally on the trees in the background when they came up.

“They’ll not be all ash in the painting, Duke,” he said. “I’ll put a dash of silver birch in to make ’em harmonize with Mr. Gully’s topper.”

The broad effect of the open air was well conveyed by Jem Ward’s slapdash method but Bendy became immediately aware of a surprising deficiency.

“Well, my lad, what do you think of it?” Jem asked, cocking his eye with pride at his work of art.

Bendigo did not feel himself to be a competent critic, but in the centre of the picture were set up the ropes and stakes of a prize ring; the emptiness of that familiar arena he considered a glaring fault in composition.

“Why, Mr. Ward, there’s nobody in the ring,” he complained.

“You’re right, my lad,” Jem said patting the picture with what Bendigo thought was a putty knife. “The ring’s vacant at present, but Gully has commissioned me to paint you in it. What we’re waiting for is to see whether you’ll be wearing the belt or not.”

“Egad! now that’s a rum go,” said the Duke. “A very rum go, as the Prince Regent said when his race-horse kicked the stable door down and escaped. The rum go is where’s it gone to?”

"Where's what gone to?" Jem asked, still laying the paint on thick.

"The championship belt has been stolen out of its glass case over your parlor door, Jem."

"It was daylight robbery then, Duke, seeing as I took it myself, and I've got it on at this very moment." Then he showed them he was wearing the missing belt under his red waistcoat.

"A very rum go," said Joe Whitaker polishing his quizzing-glass, fixing it in his eye, and staring at nothing in particular.

"Did you see Jem Ward's gig in the lane?" John Gully asked coming up. "So! And was it more secure than my chaise and horses at Doncaster? You didn't see anybody about that might drive off with it or any redbreasts from Bow Street?"

"The only red waistcoat I've seen this morning is Jem Ward's," said the Duke quizzing at its staghead silver buttons. "When the deuce did he go a-hunting last I should like to know?"

"These buttons were presented to me by the Loamshire Hunt when they lost the fox by stopping to see me fight," Jem Ward said proudly.

"I've known that happen as well," Joe Whitaker ruminated. "But it's the belt we're after, not the buttons." Jem putted away with his palette knife.

"Ah! there's others been after that for a long time now."

"But aren't I to have the belt, Mr. Ward?" Bendy asked, blinking like an owl at the mere thought of what a facer it would be for the Nottingham Fancy if he went home without it.

"When you've earned it you can have it and welcome, my lad," Jem said from under his green gingham.

"There's nobody I'd like to wear it better than you, except myself, and I can't say fairer than that."

"Didn't I earn it by defeating the Deaf 'Un?"

"Jem Burke never held the belt, my lad. I won it by beating Simon Byrne, in 1831, and I've not given it up yet."

"I had the promise of it, and I didn't think the old champion of England would go back on his word," Bendigo lamented.

Jem threw down his palette knife and came almost wrathfully from under the green umbrella—"Who are you calling the old champion? My lad, you're too cocksure. I'm still champion, although I may have gone a bit gray in the thatch, but I can still fiddle a tune with the daddles. If you want the belt you've got to take it from the man who holds it. I daresay the Duke will look about until he finds a nice bit o' turf."

"There's a spinney on the other side of the ash plantations that I'd like to show you, Mr. Whitaker," said John Gully, and they went through a gap in the ash trees together.

"I don't want to fight you, Mr. Ward," Bendy protested. "You've been a good friend to me all along."

"I'll be no worse friend to you, my lad, for proving yourself a better man than I am, although I doubt whether you can do it."

Gully and Whitaker came out of the ash plantation.

"In my opinion it's a sweet bit o' turf," the Duke said unctuously, "and we ought to thank Mr. Gully here for picking on it. There's a path between the saplings leads up to it, and none can overlook us. The grass is good grown and without a snag or stump to be seen."

"I've been telling Mr. Ward I don't want to fight him," Bendigo repeated.

"I don't want Jem to fight either," John Gully admitted, "but he will have it so."

"Egad! you'll have to fight as he won't tip up the belt," the Duke whispered to Bendy. "It's neck or nothing, my lad."

So they passed through the plantation and Bendigo allowed his coat to be persuaded off his shoulders by his burly backer.

They had brought several bottles of water, a bucket, sponges, and towels in the gig, and these were set down on the grass.

"You gentlemen will have to act as seconds and bottleholders alike," said Jem Ward. "There's a brook in one of these fields where we can get some more water if need it."

He unfastened the blue belcher with white spots from his neck as he spoke.

"Are you going to fight in my colors, Mr. Ward?" Bendigo chaffed.

"My lad, do you claim the old blue birdseye as well as the belt? Look at it again and you'll see its peppered with smaller spots than those you carry. It's my own color and I'm wearing the same fogle that I did when I beat Tom Cannon in a broiling sun on a wooden stage at Warwick in 1825."

The old Black Diamond stripped like a white marble statue. His breadth of shoulder, finely moulded arms, and rippling muscle under a satin sheen took the eye as the undulations of a race horse do under its glossy coat.

Jem Ward had lost little of his physical comeliness, but he was no longer a young man, and it remained to be seen whether he was still equipped with the com-

bination of speed and staying power that had served him so well in what were now old times.

John Gully, who had been at the ringside in many of his fights, and refereed the battle he lost against Josh Hudson, took his tight-fitting blue coat off, laid it on the grass, turned his frilled sleeves up, and fetching a gold hunting-watch out of his fob snapped open the case. The crack and rip of stitches caused a laugh as the Duke of Limbs, incommoded with shoulders like a great hurdle, struggled out of his own cutaway coat.

"Bill Atkinson makes all my coats too tight in the back," he grumbled.

"There's too much packing inside 'em," Bendigo grinned. "I've heard the dandy snip say the Squire of Ramsdale was the biggest rip-stitch of good cloth and long thread amongst his customers."

"Look here, my fine fellow, attend to your own business. Hit away and slash away in the spinney and never mind my coat."

By the aid of Jem Ward's thickest paint brush a scratch was marked on the turf, and so the fight in the field over against the ash plantation commenced without ropes and stakes, or spectators, apart from the men's seconds.

The old Black Diamond threw up his head like a war horse returning to the battlefield, the years faded out of his face and with the gay light of other days sparkling in his eyes he fiddled his fists at Bendy, who was all grins as usual, feeling inclined to treat the old gentleman with becoming respect, and not to let him over-exert himself if he could help it.

A little gentle exercise would not do Jem Ward any harm in Bendigo's opinion, so he let him spar lightly for an opening until he found one. . . .

Bendy picked himself up in a perfect wilderness of

ash trees with his nose bleeding, his jaw aching, and his head singing like a kettle.

"First blood to Jem," said John Gully.

On the Duke's knees Bendy realized that he had been grassed by a beauty. By feinting with the left Jem Ward had brought his head into position for a right-handed uppercut which nearly knocked it off. Joe Whitaker sponged the blood from his face, steadied the ash plantation, and sluiced cold sense into his brain.

"This won't do, my lad," the Duke said forebodingly. "Jem Ward has hit you off your feet and tapped your claret in the first round—drawn it from the wood I should say by the way he caught you napping. You didn't come here to pick a bouquet from the grass, and egad! I don't think you'll be able to smell it."

"I don't like to hit him, Duke," Bendigo said sheepishly.

"Dash my wig! What's the country coming to? How long has it been the fashion for young gamecocks to go about with a torn comb afraid of spoiling the old cock of the walk! The one who does the bleating takes the beating, my lad. At him like a bold bantam or he'll pull your fine feathers out. On my life and soul here's a how-d'ye do!"

The belt being in jeopardy had warned Joe Whitaker up to such a pitch of eloquence he could have outranted Demosthenes on this particular subject, and Bendigo, who had never had such a roasting in his life, felt as if he had swallowed the sponge.

Time was called opportunely by the imperturbable John Gully, who had an eye for his man and an eye for his watch. Jem Ward sprang up from Gully's knee like a two-year-old, and toed the scratch as fresh as the dew in the morning. Bendigo gave him his head foxily. Jem swung for it as if he wanted it in

a glass case on the other side of the belt. Bendy ducked and as the blow went over, landed a rib-tickler that left a livid flush on Jem's white skin and fetched the breath out of him in a grunt. Bendy felt the old champion's ribs bend like whalebone, saw the staring knuckle-marks, and, startled by the impression of his handiwork, lost his head. At least Jem Ward did his best to knock it off, and the next thing Bendigo remembered he was back on the Duke's knee with the cold sponge going over him and Joe Whitaker hissing like a groom as he applied it. He had never been hit about so badly in a battle before, let alone in the opening two rounds.

"My lad, it's a good thing we've a gig waiting to take you home," the Duke of Limbs said grimly. "Jem Ward will drive you back and put you up for a few days till you're able to get about. Egad! what an ear. If the other cauliflowers up as much you'll be able to listen to what the Nottingham Fancy have got to say without stretching 'em!"

Bendigo tightened his blue birdseye and his swollen lips together. John Gully called "Time!" The spinney echoed with blows and Gully picked his man up, distressed, breathing hard, and the satin sheen of his white body sadly marred.

Time after time Jem Ward's indomitable spirit brought his body to the scratch, and time after time it went like all flesh to grass.

"I'm going to sky the sponge, Jem," Gully declared.

"What the devil are you talking about? Bendigo hasn't won the buckle off the belt yet. Help me to the scratch, John Gully. You're wasting my strength."

Again the sound of blows in the spinney. The ash plantation mercifully screened Jem Ward's downfall

from prying eyes, except those of speckled birds, but the leaves shivered all the way up the tall, slender stems.

"Don't let it go on, Mr. Gully," Joe Whitaker pleaded.

"I'd give a hundred pounds to spare him, Duke. But if he won't spare himself what am I to do? Let me throw the sponge up, Jem. Youth will be served."

"Not whilst I can lift a hand, Jack Gully."

Bendigo sank on his knees in the grass beside the prostrate old champion and burst into tears.

"Keep the belt, Mr. Ward," he sobbed. "I can't go on. I'm beat."

Jem Ward saw himself sitting beside Phil Sampson on the grass after he had knocked him down time after time in the 25th and last round of their fight at Colnbrook, on the longest day in the year 1824. He let Bendigo help him up as he had helped poor Phil to his feet.

"My lad," he said, "the belt's yours. You've won it fair enough, and from now you're the champion of England. Fetch some water from the brook. I think it's in the next field but one!"

"I've done with prize fighting from to-day," Jem Ward said as they helped him into the gig. "I shall have to stick to my fiddle and painting. It's a good thing I brought the old green gingham. I can go home under it."

"You're not marked near so badly as me, Mr. Ward," Bendigo grinned.

"Then we shall have to say you were in our gig and Jack Gully's bad driving turned it over. Whatever we do we must keep it dark about our little turn-up in the ash plantation."

Gully cracked his whip ironically, and drove Jem

Ward down the lane followed by the Duke of Limbs with Bendigo beside him.

Full inside and outside, the "Champion" coach rattled into Nottingham with blue birdseyes streaming in the wind like the flags and pennants of a fully dressed frigate. The blue silk fogle with its white spots flew from the driver's whip and the Duke's malacca cane; it blew loose from Bendigo's neck and from the post-horn that whipped a crowd of admirers in to follow the wheels of the Liverpool coach; it was tied round the guard's glazed hat and fluttered from the jingling harness of the horses. The epidemic kindled on the top swept through the inside of the coach and hands protruding from door and window broke into a profusion of white spots on blue silk.

For this occasion only, the name of the coach had been altered into "Champion of England," the painter having done his job handsomely in white letters on a blue ground; and the old glories of the London mail when it came into the town decorated with laurels for victory, and true blue for loyalty were revived by the Blue Birdseye Coach that brought Bendigo back to his native heath. And it was noticed by many who were quick of sight that he wore buckled round his waist—as it had been put on by the great Jem Ward—although they did not know that until it was spread about—the belt that made him champion of that long-disputed territory, the prize ring of old England.

As the coach drew into the market place a mob of "Lambs" welcomed him with a great shout that rattled the shop windows, and there was all the tumult of a riot without its violence.

"'Huzzas' without 'Hussars,'" as Joe Whitaker said in one of those flashes of dry wit that sometimes crackled from his lips.

Bendigo's twinkling eyes were searching through and through the crowd and presently they found what he sought after. On a stall set up on purpose for her, although it was not market day, and supported by the pick of the Nottingham Fancy stood his mother, her untidy hair graying rapidly now, but her face rosy red and her dark eyes shining—"immoderately buxom, but a jewel of a woman," as a discerning writer pictures her up. "Here comes the coach loaded wi' mischief," joked somebody near her.

"Ay! mischief for Deaf Burke and the London swells that had their money out on him," she jeered. "Mischief for Ben Caunt when next he stands in the ropes. Glory be! he comes like a leopard. . . I called him Abednego. I taught him to be afraid o' nowt, not even a den o' lions, and he comes like a leopard wi' his spots in a chariot o' triumph."

Bendigo scrambled off the coach more like a monkey and mounted beside his mother on the creaking stall.

"Glory be!" she cried. "I have lived to see my Bendy champion of England. The bonny blue birds-eye for ever!"

The Duke of Limbs waved his capacious beaver hat from the top of the standing coach, and never did the political hustlings, blue or yellow, receive such a cheer as that overloaded stall in Nottingham market place. The Duke descended from the coach, and with old-fashioned gallantry assisted Bendigo's mother to alight from the stall.

"Egad! ma'am," he said, with a bow and a broad sweep of his beaver, "between us we have reared a champion of England."

And so, close to the spot where he had first met Cherry Ribbons on the front of Jem Burn's boxing booth, did Bold Bendigo come into his own.

EPILOGUE

Where are Deaf Burke and Bendigo,
The pets of the Fancy long ago?
Under the turf that they trampled on,
And the old Corinthians every one
To "grass" are gone.

But had we only the trick to bring
The old 'uns back to the old prize ring,
Bendy would caper and grin and "peel,"
"Made up of dodges from head to heel,"
"Whalebone and steel."

Then we should see old sporting squires
In faded pink ride over the shires,
Cursing the wires the new men fix;
Ride over the shires from over the Styx—
And over the "sticks" !

Then we should see them once again,
The portly, full-blooded, five-bottle men,
At trencher and tippie mellow the night,
Till the leaded casement was alight
With morning bright.

Those were the days when, with guineas to gain,
Gamecocks of the counties fought amain;
When the Regent by candlelight would sit
Backing his bird in a tavern pit—
And lose on it.

We may neither condemn nor praise
The sporting ways of the olden days;
But the men were men, and a man admires
The good old squires and their good old sires:
The grand old shires !

